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NEPTUNE'S ISLE

NEPTUNE'S ISLE

AND OTHER PLAYS FOR CHILDREN

BY

JOHN JAY CHAPMAN

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NEPTUNE'S ISLE

A PLAY FOR CHILDREN

CHARACTERS

King of Troezene
Queen
Leon, *their son*
Bacchylides, *a poet, tutor to Leon*
Tisias, *a soothsayer*
Phormio, *a priest of Neptune*
Aglaia, *a young priestess*
Myrmo, *a young satyr*
Glaucus, *General-in-chief of Troezene*
Io, *a cook*
Canchrax, *a captain of Mitylene*
A Sea-captain and Sailors
An Old Beggar
Neptune

NEPTUNE'S ISLE

ACT I

THE PALACE AT TROEZENE — KING, QUEEN, LEON, AND BACCHYLIDES

KING. (*To Leon.*)

Deliver all these letters to my friends,
Thy hosts in the Ionian lands of Greece.
That you will thrive I know: there is some gift
That makes men love thee, in thy countenance,
And they receive thee as a deity.

LEON

Perhaps because they know I am a prince.

KING

Enough of that, — a bookish contemplation.
Youth feeds upon imaginary facts.
You'd be a closet Plato: you in ink
Would drown the hope of a just-peeping mind.

LEON

I thought myself contented with Troezene,
And with the daily brightness of the fields, —
My books to sweeten statecraft, and my heart
Bent on the bettering of all my folk.
So thought I to live out a useful day
Sunny and unambitious. But I know
My thoughts are immature.

KING

Nay wise, — nay wise;
But uninformed. It all is as you think,
But oh so different, Leon!

QUEEN

You do go
Just for a season.

LEON

I submit.

KING

Consider all this journey as a mirror.
Accept it as a book, a thought, a picture.
Take it as decoration if you will;
For 'tis no more. But give it intellect.

LEON

I'll strive to see it so.

KING

There's a brave lad. How now, Bacchylides? Are your arrangements made? Can you leave with this youngster by noon?

BACCHYLIDES

Your Majesty knows that tutors have light luggage, and poets never anything more than paper parcels. I have my two laurel crowns, packed in my traveling case, — one for every day and one for festivities. I cannot well do with less. A bottle of the best Egyptian ink and four reeds, plucked from the bed of the Ilissus at sundown. Your Arcadian poetry is well enough — when it is penned by Athenians. What more do you ask? Ah,

a skin of wine, — a skin or two, — ballast, your Majesty.

KING

Ballast, no doubt.

BACCHYLIDES

Leave the lad to me. He wants nothing but education, manners, ideas, proper clothing, carriage, and a good heart to make him a presentable young man. Leave him to me, your Majesties. I am Athenian: I am of the very dregs and fundament, — Heracles' grandson, a scholar.

QUEEN

In truth he has shown more liveliness since you came here, Bacchylides; but you must not overwork him.

BACCHYLIDES

Time, madam, time, and a deprivation of ladies' society. These provincial palaces — begging your Majesties' pardon — are always full of unoccupied females, that do nothing but mend shirts and tear open hearts. They tear and they mend, tear and mend; and this, together with the out-at-elbows philosophers and retired wisemen who surround all experience with a picket fence of sharp pointed talk —

KING

You mean Tisias the sage.

QUEEN

A most excellent man. He comes from Mitylene, and is one of the best soothsayers of a private kind.

BACCHYLIDES

Yes, I mean him. And I ask pardon; for I may not have a chance to speak before leaving. I mean Tisias, Tisias of Mitylene. I do not speak ill of any man, least of all of an educator. I say nothing against him. God forbid that I should criticize or impugn him! But of all mean, cowardly cheats — of all scuttling and skulking thieving persons — yes, I say persons — and I speak in all openness and charity — beware of him. I would not presume to utter a suspicion in your Majesties' presence; but I repeat — beware of him. He is a serpent. The word "tisis" means expiation in the Greek tongue — (*Enter in haste Tisias, a nervous, emaciated man of fifty-five. Bacchylides perceives him.*) The Greek tongue, — the Greek tongue is spoken in all the Ionian lands, and my young friend and I will thus be able to make ourselves understood at all the courts.

TISIAS

(*Paying no attention to Bacchylides.*)

Your Majesties, my examination of the entrails shows that the journey may be undertaken with safety. I have set it all down in the cosmograph. The rabbits which I use for this thaumaturgy come from Thebes and are above suspicion. (*Gives a paper.*)

BACCHYLIDES

Hast thou drawn all this forecast out of the bowels of a dead rabbit, Tisias?

KING

Peace, Bacchylides: it is his profession.

QUEEN

Let me see. The reading shows no danger that hangs above the prince? (*Takes the paper and examines it.*) It is better that these things should be examined in serious quietude.

TISIAS

Much better, Madam. I have here certain indications —

KING

Bacchylides, withdraw.
Leon, I'll see thee on the water's edge
And send my blessing with thee.
(*Exeunt Bacchylides and Leon. King turns to the Queen and Tisias.*)
The worst is come: he's dead in love with her.
And she a priestess vowed to Neptune's temple,
A lily vestal, — dedicated nun.
And I, my kingdom on the raging shore
Exposed to the exasperated flood,
And open to the treacherous-smiling King
Who claims me for his grandson.
Neptune, Neptune! This was thy trap.
Know, Tisias, my friend,
This babe at first was cast up by the sea, —
Thrown in the rolling pebbles of the shore
By fawning hounds of Neptune; I stood near
And as she op'd a round and turquoise eye
Like some benefic jewel of the sea,
Hard, confident, and yet confiding too,
I wrapped the sea-mite in warm seaweed round

And bore her to the palace, marveling.
And as I walked I seemed to see some shore
Like a live opal in a pearly sea,
Clouded with shining vapors, — a green isle, —
An island in transparent vapors set,
And crowned with glassy green. The oracles
Did with one tongue declare her Neptune's child
Which he confides to me for bringing up.
At which a costly temple did I raise —
As much in fear, as worship, of the God.
And as a ward of the Eternal Gods
(Full fifteen summers passing like a dream)
She lived within my kingdom.

TISIAS

I have known
Something of this, not all. And what persuades you
The prince's thought has found her?

KING

Everything.
He wanders in the fields, he dreads my eye,
He eats too little, goes to bed too late,
Gets up too early, chats in smoky huts
And plays the god to peasants. But his air!
The serious and hypocritic mien
With which, may heaven forgive me, he responds
When questioned on his studies. Leon's studies!
His bedroom is a snake's nest of old clothes,
His desk a hospital for broken pens,
Burnt candles, leather fobs, and bits of chalk.

And, wrapping them, O Phœbus! half a verse.
Original, inspired, — in the spelling;
And in the substance, dead and drowned with love.

(*He produces it.*)

QUEEN

You *must* not read the lines. I'll put them back.

(*Takes them.*)

KING

Tisias found them.

TISIAS

But I did not read them.
I went there searching for a Latin grammar.

KING

A most unlikely place to find a book.
But, Tisias, enough. Your zeal I know;
And your professional accomplishments
Shall find the public reason for this journey.
Kings may have private reasons in their breast,
Which through good augury are then expressed.
See you provide the reason.

(*Exit Tisias.*)

KING. (*To Queen.*)

When he returns he must not find her here.
These ragged schoolboy passions, once aflame,
Will not be quenched except in wider fire.
I would not for the wealth of all my state
Corrupt the dedicated maidenhood
Planted as by a heavenly miracle
Upon my soil. She must be rapt away
And grafted in the college for young nuns

Ere his return: to Corinth shall she go.
Send me the maid.

QUEEN

She is as innocent of ill-intent
Or knowledge that his inward taper burns —

KING

No doubt, no doubt. All sin is innocent:
This is the cause. Go, send the maid to me.

QUEEN

But be not rough with her.

KING

Rough with a lily, —
Or reprehend a blossom on the brier!
Go, and be patient. Not such toys as these
Do break my sleep.

(*Exit Queen, enter Glaucus.*)

Now, Glaucus, thy gray eyes look melancholy.
The scouts upon our northern coasts are keen.
What see they?

GLAUCUS

My eyes see nothing ; but my scouting thoughts
Have seen the downfall of a monarchy.

KING

Nay, nay! Some shift must serve —

GLAUCUS

The gold is gone
For which the Orchomenian mercenary
Served you so well. Our soldiers mutiny,
And our hereditary enemy,
The bitter, black, and Mitylenian horde,
Hang o'er our griefs, like vultures in the wind.

For they by secret, unsuspected spies,
Keep well informed of our most private woe;
While all the inward crumble of our state,
That comes from unthrift, hands us on to ruin.
Money must save us.

KING

Then impose a tax.

GLAUCUS

Your Majesty doth jest. Our last relief
Came from a free-will offering of the poor;
For so our richest burghers must be called.

KING

Indeed they are so. Those devoted souls
Have sold their plate for us.

GLAUCUS

One plan remains —

KING

I knew your enterprise would find one out.
Of course a plan remains, a plain strong plan —
A plan is all we need. Your thoughts, good Glaucus.

GLAUCUS

Your Majesty doth know that for some years
All the Ægean flocks to Neptune's fane,
Which from a little unobtrusive shrine
Has grown into a rich and famous Temple
Whose treasury is ever at flood tide,
Whose tablets, pictures, statues, blocks of gold,
And hammered armory of votive gift,
Lend you the proudest name by which fame knows you,
"The Poseidonian King."

KING

Well, well, go on. Your plan —

GLAUCUS

Is that you seize this wealth to build your state,
To pay the soldiers, fill the treasury,
And set our fainting war upon its feet.

KING. (*Rising.*)

Not for an empire! Go, ignoble man,
And get employment in some pirate isle
Where theft and cunning make a chancellor
And murder makes a king. I need you not:
I live by Neptune's gift. Out of the waters
My kingdom came, a new and sacred isle,
To meet the prayers my shipwrecked ancestor
Sent up to feeling Jove,—
Out of the waters! And this craggy rock
May sink again and leave me in the sea
Ere I will lift a hand to steal an acre.

GLAUCUS

You take but to preserve; the vulture town
Of Mitylene swoops upon it else.

KING

No more! I'll not a word of it! No more.
Send me the little priestess. I intend
To safeguard all that Deity doth send.

(*Exit Glaucus, enter Aglaia accompanied by Phormio, a large fat priest.*)

KING. (*To priest.*)

You may remain without.

(*Exit Phormio.*)

Aglaia, little daughter of the sea,
Wilt thou not fade and perish on dry land,

Like those cloud-colored infants of the deep
That turn to tears if we would handle them?

AGLAIA

Your Majesty?

KING

Art thou content? But what bears questioning?
It must be done. Thy father is a god,
And I his servant. Thou art dedicate.
Something important hinges on thy life,
Not yet divulged to us. Art thou content?

AGLAIA

Ever I am content to light the tapers,
And with great hazel boughs to sweep the cell;
But who I am, or what, I do not know.
Someone has whispered that I am your daughter
Whom, for I know not why, you must disown.

KING

Someone's a fool! No, no, Aglaia, no!
I found thee in the sea.

AGLAIA

Ah, that is good!

KING

It was the close of a long afternoon,
And o'er the margin shallows and bright pools
The mist-born star of evening drank the wave.
I to the outer shelvings of the ebb
Had wandered like a web-foot animal
Lapping the scene. And thou cam'st rolling in —
A bundle of child's clothing, — nay, a child.

AGLAIA

Ah, that was good.

KING

I would have kept thee, but the god forbade.

AGALIA

Believe me, I do love thee.

KING

I was told
To hide thee from the ruffle of the world,
Nor take the gift for mine! I guard it so.

AGLAIA

Believe me, I do love thee.

KING

Gentle Aglaia,
If thou be Neptune's daughter, as 'tis said,
He will protect thee. But my duty's clear.
Our temple is a kind of market-place,
Crowded with worship, littered and defiled
With every Mediterranean mariner,
Tramp-king, and roving prophet. You must go,
Till your probationary year be past,
And dwell within the school for priestesses
At Corinth; where the caverns of the shore
Resound with faint æolian harmonies
Unheard by men, and where the undulous wave
Rises and falls forever.
And nothing but the blink of holy nuns
Receives the rippling half-light upward shot
From Neptune's pavement. There the god may
come,
But else, no spirit.

AGLAIA

No spirit else?

KING

It cannot be forever — that I feel —
Yet must be now. I grudge the god his child.
You cannot help but know it.

AGLAIA

I will go.
But, sir —

KING

Nay speak. (*She kneels.*)

AGLAIA

For you 'tis plain. You have your oracle.

KING

Thine shall be given thee.

(*Voices without; she rises. Enter Prince Leon and Bacchylides with their luggage, also a sea-captain and mariners. Enter from the other side Queen, Tisias, Glaucus, and Phormio.*)

BACCHYLIDES

The winds are favorable and our ship
Is dancing at her cable. This young lad
Bids old and young adieu.

KING

It's but a step to see you to the beach.

(*He takes Bacchylides by the elbow. In case scenery is used, a slip curtain goes up and shows all on the beach, and a ship at anchor with sails up. If there is no scenery these things must be imagined.*)

KING

Friends, we'll attend the prince. A tidy vessel
And colored with exulting fantasy.
I love a lively-painted, jolly bark,
And sails that make a picture of the sea.
With what a curt'sy and a beckoning motion
The hussy rides! Leon, my blessings take;
Come soon again.

(*Leon kneels solemnly, and tableau.*)

QUEEN. (*To Bacchylides.*)

Have you his thickest tunic in the bale?
They say the winds at Tyre are very shrewd.

BACCHYLIDES

I have provided.

(*Enter an old beggar in evident haste and awe. All turn towards him, without, however, breaking the tableau.*)

OLD BEGGAR

Watching the dim and solitary sea,
I saw great Neptune lift his even brow
And look serenely through the plunging wave.
Unstained forever hung his heavy locks,
His eye as brilliant as the emerald,
But motionless, — as if its thought controlled
The bright, smooth-flashing coursers of the deep
That drew him onward.

(*Curtain.*)

ACT II

SCENE I — AN ISLAND

(*Enter, as from a shipwreck, Tisias and Phormio, carrying a chest.*)

TISIAS. (*With a chart in his hand.*)
This island is not on Ptolemy's map.

TISIAS

Nor these fogs neither. Of what good is a chart unless the fogs are set down plainly?

PHORMIO

It is certain that we ran for three days straight before a fair southwest wind, passing Crete, Cyprus, Rhodes, Skyros, Naxos; being, as the captain told us, somewhat aided by the Phocaean current.

PHORMIO

That was before the rudder broke.

TISIAS

Yes; the storm may have put us out a little.

PHORMIO

There were four days when the wind was black and the sun did not rise, or seem to.

TISIAS

That's the point. Now in what direction was the wind during those four days? If we could find that out we should know all.

PHORMIO

All *that* was after the captain fell overboard.

TISIAS

He fell at the first clap of thunder, like a weathercock, into the foaming brine.

PHORMIO

God rest him. We are alive.

TISIAS

We are ruined.

PHORMIO

Nonsense, nonsense. When we find out where we are, we can make up a story as to how we got here.

TISIAS

And all this treasure belonging to the god Neptune —

PHORMIO

It is no more than our share, — a small trifle, a doorkeeper's fee for showing the rest to the Mitylenians. Trouble not yourself about that. It will pay our passage away from this island. We are at least here upon dry ground, from which we may defy Neptune and all his works. Where is the little priestess?

TISIAS

Below in the cove picking blackberries; from which blackberries, if they are ripe, I intend to reckon the latitude of the isle.

PHORMIO

Tisias, you're a fool.

TISIAS

How? What do you say?

PHORMIO

When I asked the King to let you take passage on this ship to Corinth, it was to save your life, was it not?

TISIAS

It was in order that I might not be at Troezene when the Mitylenians arrived and the loss of the treasure was discovered.

PHORMIO

Good: your life I saved.

TISIAS

You saved my life!

PHORMIO

I am bearing you to safety. And, as the captain and the crew have been lost, and someone must take command of the expedition —

TISIAS

Yes, Phormio.

PHORMIO

There must be authority. And besides this, Tisias, your conversation fatigues me. Therefore, I make you my servant.

TISIAS

Your servant!

PHORMIO

For the voyage only. On arrival I shall set you free. It is for the sake of discipline, and because I have a plan as to our life here. It has occurred to me as the best plan.

TISIAS

Yes, Phormio.

PHORMIO

Say "*yes sir.*"

TISIAS

Yes sir.

(*Aside.*)

The punishment of perfidy begins.
Here am I, wrecked upon a distant isle,
In company with this most beastly slave
Whose slave I am. I must pretend to yield,
Till time shall put some dagger in my hand.

PHORMIO

Are any of those sacrificial rabbits left over?

TISIAS

Drowned, all of them —

PHORMIO

Then make a fire in the rocks below and cook some of them.

TISIAS

The sacred rabbits from which, with my instruments of divination, I draw the future!

PHORMIO

Fire! We must use the gods' saucepans. Send the girl to me! Wait! I'll have dinner at six, — and two servants to wait on me.

(*Exit Tisias.*)

PHORMIO

(*Calling.*)

Tisias!

(*Re-enter Tisias.*)

TISIAS

Yes sir, yes sir, —

PHORMIO

Convey this baggage to the sheltered bank
Below the giant rock. You shall scoop out,
Using your much-too-much of empty leisure,
A proper chamber for my bride and me.

TISIAS

Mercy, what bride?

PHORMIO

I am retiring from the priestly life —
And long have contemplated matrimony.

TISIAS

Priestess and priest. O heavens, the blasphemy!
Man, man, — you will be blackened to a stone
By instantaneous lightning! You'll be left
A cinder.

PHORMIO

Tisias, no more I say!
Or I will speak a language you can feel.
Convey the vessels; and prepare the meal.

(*Exeunt Phormio and Tisias in opposite directions, Tisias dragging the chest. Enter Aglaia.*)

AGLAIA

This isle is Aphrodite's toilet box
From which she chooses jewels for her hair.
Begirt it is with wet enamel stones
That gem the edge like lamps, yes light the deeps, —
Those alabaster glooms of weedy green
Where in the fanning waters are displayed

The fringes of Poseidon's canopy.
Envious of earth, he spreads his water-kingdom
Up through delicious and perpetual swamps,
And every salt seduction of sea flowers,
Beach-pea and cranberry, with meadow-sweet,
Sundew, and waxen tiny tea-berries,
That lace the silken cushions of the marsh
With leaves of jade. Such moist Elysium
Of ribboned grasses, ferns, and jungles soft,
Moss ankle-deep — like melted glaciers —
Leads from the seashore inland; there the trees,
Green as the glassy verdure of the sea,
Meet them and do obeisance. But such trees!
Spruces with double tassels at the elbow,
Like to some richest burgher's idlest wife,
With superfluity of sable furs
Filling the air, — trees that with greedy pride,
For fear some grass shall occupy the earth,
Stretch their green luxury along the soil
And carpet it themselves, — the running juniper
More seldom seen than tripped on, the blue spruce —
O blessed shipwreck! Blessed, blessed fog
And every crime that led us into it.
For crime it is, crime somewhere. Blessed crime!
That lets me loose to view the face of heaven,
To feel the wind, to see the ocean heave,
To — to — meet old fumbling foolish Tisias.

(*Enter Tisias.*)

Tisias! Tisias! (*No answer.*) Tisias, I say, —

TISIAS

I hear thee.

AGLAIA

Tisias, you and I are *things* no more,
Pieces and pawns and bits of something else.
I am no tool nor bit of furniture,
No sconce for Neptune's taper; nor are you
A patient mat to clean a kingly shoe.
We are companions in humanity,
Drenched into life, — set soaking on a shore
To dry and find our souls. Come, Tisias,
Sit, and I'll tell thee more philosophy
Than you could draw from out a flock of sheep,
With all your skewers.

TISIAS. (*Gloomily.*)

The isle has changed us.

AGLAIA

Brought the inner out:
Let loose the bird.

TISIAS

Yes, you are very changed.

AGLAIA

You shall be also.

TISIAS. (*Gesture with his thumb.*)

He is very changed.

AGLAIA

Who "he"? the fat man?

TISIAS

Phormio, Phormio too;
Though not grown thin.

AGLAIA

And how is Phormio changed?

TISIAS. (*Mysteriously.*)

The bird is loose.

AGLAIA

The bird is loose?

TISIAS

Hark! All this moisture and drip from the trees takes the curl from the hair. (*She unconsciously feels for her locks.*) The sleek mermaid and the siren that sings and dives, and the green, scaly naiad that peeps and flutters — and behold it is a tree —

AGLAIA

Tisias, your brains are turned with famine and salt water. Here is what was once a biscuit. I myself can live upon clams, scallops, and the strong-tasting blackberry. I am used to nun's diet.

TISIAS

No.

AGLAIA

What is it then?

TISIAS

Phormio retires: he puts aside priestly things. He settles — he — he —

AGLAIA

Tisias, come to yourself. Hold the malady at bay and be a man. What is this mumbling and trembling? Phormio retires?

TISIAS

He — he marries.

AGLAIA

On this island?

(*Tisias nods.*)

AGLAIA

ME! — The monster! How long have you known this?

TISIAS

Ten minutes.

AGLAIA

I'll dive into the sea and turn a dolphin,
To scud behind the driving fisherman
And live on offal. I will build a nest
Upon the crow-top of the crooked'st tree,
Whose jagged spars tear fat men climbing up.
I'll burrow in the earth, — I'll disappear.

TISIAS

But he will search, —

AGLAIA

Yes, — but he will *not* search.
For, — hold! We will forestall all thought of search
By news of drowning. Thou shalt say I'm dead,
Drawn to the bosom of my father-god
Through jealous intimation of foul play.
Neptune is terrible. This, Phormio dreads,
And thou must lead him there to walk the shore;
And let him find my soaked and stainèd dress,
Fillet, and little trinkets of my body
That never living maid would cast away.
Then, let him tremble! I with fingers deft
Will all o'erlace my bodice with green spoils
Of vines and bark of birches, rich as silk,

And, as a naiad, live within the cave
That fronts the outlet of the narrow bay.
There have I seen a seaborn satyr splash —
Its eyes like a young robin — in the surge.
Never he'll seek me there! 'Tis near the flood.
But thou shalt bring me food. Those tiny fruits
(It seems all nature here is miniature)
Must from the cunning rabbits be withdrawn
To serve our need: starved apples, red as nuts,
Wild grapes, with all the store of raspberries
The trustful blackbird leaves upon the bush,
For his to-morrow. Fish I'll catch myself
With crooked pins of gold on threaded hairs,
Which in the moonlight from the rocks I'll throw
When none is by to see. The wind is rising —

TISIAS

Some after-trouble follows from the sea,
That seems to growl and bark about our refuge.
Small animals come jumping through the brakes
As if pursued. Ha! What is that?

(*A child, aged three, dressed as a satyr and playing on a wooden pipe, on which it can make only two notes, crosses the stage stolidly without noticing anyone. Tisias and Aglaia stand in amazement.*)

AGLAIA

It's stalking to its nest; I'll follow it.

(*Exit Aglaia and enter Phormio.*)

PHORMIO

Tisias, I have seen strange things in this isle.

TISIAS

Yes sir.

PHORMIO

Where is Aglaia?

TISIAS

Gone.

PHORMIO

The water seems rising —

TISIAS

The wind too, Phormio.

PHORMIO

This island is not so large but that Neptune could reach us if he would.

TISIAS

The water soaks up through — see there! It is a spring of salt water. We are in a sieve.

PHORMIO

Where is Aglaia? (*Thunder and wind.*)

TISIAS

When I did tell her of your black intent
She screamed to Neptune, fled along a cliff,
And so I lost her: she will come again.
Go seek her on the margin of the isle.

PHORMIO

Neptune's her father —

TISIAS

So she seemed to cry —

PHORMIO

Find me a cavern, cave, or hole in the ground,
Where I may bide the passage of the storm.

Anything, Tisias, — a hollow tree —
If it be large enough, and on a hill.

TISIAS

Look if the seagull yonder be not poised
Above the corpse or body of a man,
That rises, sinks, and rises — "Help!" he cries.
I'll save him —

PHORMIO

Not at all; it is a sheet,
A shirt, or shred of garment.

TISIAS

True, no more.
I will not notice it: it is a sail,
Or veil of Leucothea; such a skein
Odysseus snatched to float him to the shore.

PHORMIO

It comes to us, I cannot choose but go —
(*Exit Phormio and re-enter, calling.*)
Help! Help! O Tisias, see here!
(*Showing Aglaia's dress.*)

TISIAS

She has destroyed herself.

PHORMIO

The tide is rising: see the angry crests
Like monsters roaring at us.

TISIAS

Phormio, friend —
A dry tree's what you need. I know the place,
If it be big enough.

(*He measures him about.*)

I think it can be done.

(*Aside.*)

One comrade in a cave does hide
And one within a tree;
While I have need my pets to feed,
For I alone am free.

(*Exeunt.*)

ACT II

SCENE II — ANOTHER PART OF THE ISLAND

(*Music. The young satyr is sitting almost asleep, his pipe in his hand. Enter Bacchylides with his lyre. He is on tiptoe and has been following and charming the young satyr.*)

BACCHYLIDES. (*Sings.*)

I

A feather floated down from Eros' wing.
(Help me, Apollo, thou art everywhere;
Give me to see and catch the gleaming thing.)
He vanished in the liquid, magic air,
And left no track.
Alas, sweet thoughts come back:
Lost music is a kind of sweet despair.

II

Where has he wandered, open-eyed, alone?
(Help me, Apollo, thou art everywhere.)
His steps are fresh upon the mossy stone,
Beside the brookfall on the soft green stair
They leave their track.
Alas, sweet thoughts come back:
Lost music is a kind of sweet despair.

III

Hold him, ye nymphs! Surround his hazy eyne.
(Help me, Apollo, thou art everywhere.)

Becloud him with the fumes of Music's wine,
That melt the heart and die upon the air,
Yet leave a track;
For all good thoughts come back:
Blest thoughts, the soul's most sweet, most deep repair.

(*He touches his lyre occasionally after going into prose, so as to lull the child.*)

It has taken me six hours of stalking, but I have him. He fled the opium, but it overcame. It rolled behind him in a dulcet cloud of melodious rapture. The rustic must succumb to science. See how sound! He snores like crackling seaweed. (*Touches the lyre and at the same time takes the child's pipe and tries notes upon it.*) And this is music! There is no Academy on this island: so much is certain. The scale I take to be Dorian, — the cellar-doorian ascending scale. Will his mother care to lose him? That is the question. Or is he just a fungus, a round orange, puffing up out of the soil? There should some man in Greece be appointed to count these islands; for they are so many that they multiply and decrease of themselves, before it is noted. Here now is one which nobody knows of, and inhabited by sea-urchins.

(*Gives back the pipe, then strums.*)

Up and dance, my little man,
Dance as nicely as you can.
Dance for old Bacchylides,
Underneath the mossy trees.

For your mother taught you how,
I can see it in your brow.
I can see it in your knees, —
Dance for old Bacchylides.
(*The little satyr rises and dances.*)

Up and dance, up and dance,
Half awake and half in trance.
Goatling of the shiny shingle,
Rabbit jumping through the dingle;
Here thy parlor, hung with green,
Here thy nursery is seen,
Sylvan sward and forest hall, —
Dance, thou tiny bacchanal!

He's tame now, and will follow me to the world's end. (*He gives the satyr a bit of biscuit from his pocket.*) What is thy name?

MYRMO

Myrmo.

BACCHYLIDES

Do you speak Greek or Hebrew? Neither. A most extensive language. The less he says, the more I understand. Neither. He loves me because I teach him the elements. Here is a great comment upon your new god, Education, that I, a gray-headed cynic, with gout and a witty rejoinder in every one of my toes, should teach dancing to this child of the woods! If Leon were here I would expound this: I would give him a philosophical prolegomena as long as Green's Introduction. I would not spare.

I am paid for this part: the rest is the froth and generosity of my mind. (*Enter Leon.*) Leon, silentium! Bid good morrow to your fellow pupil. I open a school here, and the squirrels alone may sit in the gallery and chatter. The rest must observe rules. Master Myrmo: Master Leon.

LEON

This, this only was wanting. (*Shakes hands with Myrmo.*) Comrade, I will do myself the honor of giving you a kiss.

BACCHYLIDES. (*To Leon.*)

Now shall *you* dance for the satyr.
(*He causes Myrmo to sit on a stool, as auditor, and makes Leon dance while he himself sings.*)
One two, son of a king,
(If you call these Greeklings kings at all)
We have a name for everything,
And names are great, while things are small.
Here is pine and eglantine,
And the meandering sacred vine.
Here let hickory with Terpsichore
Interlace and intertwine,
Interweave and interleave,
And wind and bind with mystic sign;
While young Saturn's eyes are growing
Larger in the moon's decline.

LEON

Moon's decline, — a failure.

BACCHYLIDES

See how he hangs his head, like the poppy.

Is it not the tender-thoughted moon? — that moon which man only sees when he's dead tired on the way home, say, or when he rises to shut the window at midnight? Poetry, — poetry, my lad. What have you to do with poetry — thou foolish young lover — thou clay-clod of hopeless modernity? A moment since I felt an impulse to teach; but now I see thou art so matter-of-fact, odious, unintellectual, and commonplace in love that I will not open the wine.

LEON

But what is this island? Is it history?
Who made these paths and little corridors?
These hanging beards of moss on ivied boughs?
This arras-tinted, beechen tapestry
Gives all the gravity of ancient state
To fairy fortresses: rocks, slowly won,
That crown a secret terrace, galleries
Where a lost princess might be counting gems
Attended by the toadstools. How can walks,
Never betrod, or only trod in dreams
By moon-lit lovers threading paths of thought—

BACCHYLIDES

Man has been here! This veil of mystery
Is hung by Nature on the face of man.
She clothes dead peasants with the state of kings,
Setting tall iris in imperial grief
To watch his coffin, — powders the rich pall
With seeds vermilion: drops gold-shining knots
On the red mold of rusty sarsenet,
And stands behind the service. Not a spray

But hides the spring, the sickle, or the plow,
The pasture, the quick lane to neighbors' barn,
And barefoot children standing at the stile. —
These are the story Nature overwrites
With daring pathos. And their eyes peep through —
The blue-eyed children bloom in dreadful death;
The farmer with the pine roots in his heart
Transfuses Nature: such is Fairyland.

LEON

But this is terrible.

BACCHYLIDES

It is, it is.
All beauty has a touch of terror in it.
And this young goat (who's had enough of learning
And glances like a schoolboy at the clock)
Is the last conquest of transforming Pan, —
Human, yet how he gambols o'er the brake,
And throws his waxy hooflets to the sun!
The lecture's done. Run, children, to your play!

(*During this speech Myrmo has gone out. Exit also Bacchylides.*)

LEON.

(*Who is sunk in gloom.*)

So doth love, dying, leave his legacy
Of poesy to Nature. All our thoughts
Are worthless till they reappear as dreams;
Alive they're nothing, dead they're fairyland,
And touched with tragic grace. O my Aglaia!
My springing fountain in a cloister's jail,

Green bush within the tomb, I could not save thee,
Because Olympus set his marble blocks
Upon my heart. I might disprison thee —
Yet not release; Zeus only can do that.
I have not left thee: I but seek the clue.

(*Enter Aglaia behind, dressed in bark and green leaves. She sees Leon, starts, recoils, almost totters, exclaims faintly, "Ah, Neptune!" recovers herself, and comes forward, still unobserved.*)

AGLAIA. (*Aloud.*)

I thought he must be here. Pardon, fair sir,
Has a young scrambling satyr passed this way?

LEON

No, — Yes he has. But you — you are his mother?

AGLAIA

Yes, and his nurse, the only tribe he has.
We are the heritors: we are Proteus' seals
And island things; I pray you do not hurt us.

LEON

O heavens, new pathos! Are not men and women
Sufficient for the gods, but they must damn
With animal infusion heavenly souls?
Good woman, if you were a farmer's wife
Seeking her chubby child, I'd tell you plainly
The child was here. Go plait your circular brow
With reeds to hide the animal fulness of it!
Go, low-browed Galatea, — thy child was here.

AGLAIA

I am Neptune's daughter and a thing of the sea.

LEON

Perfect in heartlessness are all the gods!

AGLAIA. (*Aside.*)

The worst is over. Men in women see
Only their dresses; and by shift of shift
Andromache may pass for Hecuba.

(*To Leon.*)

In which direction went he?

LEON

Leapt in the brambles.
In which direction? Thou art beautiful
And in thy lineage near to one I loved,
But older. And thy children —

AGLAIA

Nay, I've but one.

LEON

Through thy base godhead still thou gleamest
woman.

AGLAIA

Oh no, my lord! But you'll not do us harm —

LEON

I'll tell thee all my story. To uncoil
A snake about my heart, I'll sup with serpents.

AGLAIA. (*Aside.*)

A pretty compliment.

(*She sits down.*)

LEON

I was born a prince,
But one with leisure to become a man,
Not a stuffed ox or block for draping clothes.

My father is a kind of gentleman
More than a king. And I have run as wild
As goats on Capri. For our kingdom's small:
They could not lose me. You'll not understand, —
You wild-bird creature, you who live on rime
And drink the dew before the sun is up, —
The narrowness of kingdoms, the shrunk hearts
And evil-smelling houses. I grew sick
And on the margin of the prisoning sea
Drank opium from the clouds.

AGLAIA

Alas, sad boy!
Would I had been there with some porcelain crabs
Or old sea-helmets, drawn from drownèd knights,
To be your playfellow.

LEON

And there I met
An all-but-child young priestess, muttering
Poseidon's liturgy along the shore.
It seems they break the appetite of nuns
With prayer. I gave her Homer for her meat;
And every day, at stolen hours of thrift,
With golden cup and loaf renewed the gift
In draughts of rapture. I her thought would teach,
And she my soul had taken; each to each
Became the Homer where the other read.
Within our hearts in little drops we bled,

Listing to notes no minstrel ever sung, —
The harp of life that in the bosom hung.

AGLAIA

Ah, was it so indeed?

LEON

Life! — from the core of life were both cut off,
She by her vow, and I by my despair —
Yet crept it in: gold was it like a bell
And glowing like a burning film of light.
But what know ye,
Ye senseless beings of the glossy earth,
Begirt with leafy beauty, ye fresh grasses
That wave in the wind, what can ye know of
love?

AGLAIA

Even for that instruct me. *Her* you taught;
And he who could inspire a crabbed nun
Might wake a wood-nymph.

LEON

She in her bosom bore the unshattered sphere,
The crystal microcosm, the hot beat
That weaves the earth to union with the sun,
And all to God! What part in this hast thou?
Beautiful mask, thing uninhabited!
For whether in the iris of the moon
The water lily shows her paly glow,
Or orchid blazes in the tropic shade,
Nature but imps us; her brute-glorious eyes
She sets upon us as in mockery.
The fungus personates the blessed lily,
And all inanimate nature imps man's thought
To make him heartsick.

AGLAIA

Thou speakest things I may not understand,
Being but earth-born.

LEON

Couldst thou understand
I could not speak them. Thou dost set me free.
For see what prize the little priestess bore,
And thou an empty vessel. Fair thou art
With something of Aglaia's humorous look
That minds me of her.

AGLAIA

But let me speak —

LEON

But what hast thou to speak?

AGLAIA. (*Revealing herself.*)

A life within a life.
When love is taken, Nature turns to toys;
When love returns she mirrors all love's joys.
Then turn the concave mirror of thy breast
To take the image that is here expressed —
A maid in Nature.

LEON

Aglaia!

AGLAIA

Leon!

LEON

But how did you come here?

AGLAIA

God knows, but I am here.

LEON

How long have you been here?

AGLAIA

Some week or two. A shipwreck.

LEON

But how long and when did you know me?

AGLAIA

I knew you the instant I saw you on the log, frowning.

LEON

Why did you not speak before?

AGLAIA

Because I am not in the habit of declaring my love to young princes. They must begin.

LEON

But you knew of my love before.

AGLAIA

It is not enough.

LEON

But Aglaia, — what have I said?

AGLAIA

Well, I do not know that I could repeat it; but it is enough for an introduction.

LEON

But Aglaia, Aglaia, —

AGLAIA

Well, Leon.

LEON

Why this unusual — this fantastic dress?

AGLAIA

I will explain. It is a story, strange yet natural: you will approve.

LEON

But you'll — you'll — catch cold!

AGLAIA

There is no such thing in this climate.

LEON

And, — and that young animal —

AGLAIA

Myrmo, the satyr? A friend, but no relative.

LEON

You said he was your boy.

AGLAIA

No sir. No, Leon. It was you that said he was my son. I said, — I may have said I was his mother. He is an islander, I think.

BACCHYLIDES. (*Entering.*)

How now, Master Hyacinth, have you seen yourself in the pool yet? (*Observing Aglaia.*) I beg pardon I'm sure, Madam. If I picked a blossom from you by accident last evening, forgive me. I took you for a hawthorn bush. I — I — don't know your name; but I could sing you to the tune of Green Sleeves.

LEON

Look, Bacchylides — Aglaia!

BACCHYLIDES

What? No! And she so chaste, so prudish, that she would never sit more than four hours on a wet stone at midnight watching the ebb — For shame! Aglaia, you have followed us.

LEON

No! Bacchylides.

AGLAIA

I will explain. No, I will not. Why should

I? *You* shall explain. How came you on my island —?

BACCHYLIDES. (*To Leon.*)

How came we on her island?

LEON

Let me see. We were sailing from Egypt to Abydos and our water was low, and we stopped to draw water —

BACCHYLIDES

But where?

LEON

Why here.

BACCHYLIDES

Plainly some god is at the bottom of it.

AGLAIA

And do you spend some time with us? But forgive me, Leon! you talk so well; and I saw that I had only to keep quiet and the honey would drop from the comb. (*To Bacchylides.*) He is pouting a little because he did not recognize me. Why, this was the best sign of true love — blindness. He is wondering what he said to me. Comfort us, Bacchylides. You arrive in the nick of time to save us from a quarrel over nothing. I tell thee what! — Sing to us. Bacchylides, I have never asked much of you. Will you do me a favor and sing to us?

BACCHYLIDES

You have never asked nor I ever done aught for you. No, indeed! Except to perjure my soul and damn my character with black infamy

for serving the mad love passing between both of you. How often have I told lies to your mother-in-law that is to be, when she taxed Leon with late hours! "Pindar is hard, Madam," said I. "Pindar and these oily, little, smoking lamps hurt the eyes" — and him with a blotched face for bellowing about his love! Go off, ungrateful monkey. You get no songs out of me.

LEON

Keep begging, Aglaia. This is the tuning up that all musicians must do, this protestation.

AGLAIA

Good Bacchylides, dear Bacchylides, Bacchylides, a song, —

BACCHYLIDES

Well, I will sing you a song I wrote before I knew any of you or your sea monsters. It was written to a girl that dwelt at Sunium long ago.

LEON

More tuning up.

BACCHYLIDES

And what if it were? Can I sing without the old magic behind? Go to! You have the sign manual of all true love: you believe yourselves the true discoverers, you only, you two. Sit ye down over there. This was of the old era, before you two walked out of your shells to occupy the earth.

(*Tunes and sings.*)

I

This was the summer whose gradual splendor
Burned the meridian, while the deep sea
Whispering, murmuring, watched the surrender,
Cradled my union, my loved one, with thee.

II

Mute was the music and mystic the pæan
That skirted the magical days as they fled.
These were the nights when the starred empyrean
Bent o'er the passion it silently fed.

III

Turn, ancient earth! Toward twilight thou wagonest,
Bliss that has lasted for thousands of years.
Lo! as thou sinkest, behold the protagonist,
Hesperus, pilot his glittering spheres.

(*Curtain.*)

ACT III

SCENE I — ANOTHER PART OF THE ISLAND

(*A great tree on one side of the stage. From a high branch of the tree a basket is hanging by a string. Enter Tisias. He puts some nuts and leaves into the basket.*)

TISIAS. (*Calling.*)

Phormio! (*Aside.*) I will reduce that great porpoise. He shall come down more like the young monk than he went up. It was the fright that raised him: he clung like a wild cat, and sped upward. Now I have removed the lower branches for my more commodious entertainment here, and he is become a treed catamount. (*He sits down and begins to eat some melons, grapes, biscuits, etc.*)

Phormio!

PHORMIO. (*Feebly, from above.*)

What, Tisias?

TISIAS

More refreshment!

PHORMIO

More berries and less nuts, good Tisias.

TISIAS

What! Those cone-pine seedlets are accounted a delicacy at Italian dinner parties.

They eat them with spinach and with risotto and with candied pistachio rodomontados.

PHORMIO

But, dear Tisias, by themselves and without salt — and it takes so long to find the seeds: every cone must be picked over.

TISIAS

Time? Time? You have time enough, surely. Do you remember Æsop's fable about the pig and the banker? No? I will tell it to you. Ah, a great story-teller is Æsop; and he generally lays the scenes of his tales, or the tales of his scenes, in familiar spots.

PHORMIO

What are *you* eating, Tisias?

TISIAS

Only a leg of the last rabbit, and three fingers of biscuit which I found in the gold ware.

PHORMIO

But those fruits?

TISIAS

Nothing. Nothing in the world. What? Oh these? Grapes to be sure. I brought them to show you, because they lend color to my belief that this island was once dry ground.

PHORMIO

Send me up a bunch of them, dear, sweet Tisias.

TISIAS. (*Eating.*)

Not for worlds! They puff and blow out the body. I have seen some new sights and made

some astrological observations and measured the tides.

PHORMIO

Well —?

TISIAS

We are sinking rapidly. There is water in the hold and all the creatures — for the isle is inhabited —

PHORMIO

What!

TISIAS

All the creatures are putting on sea-forms. You have read about this. There is a young sort of skunk-satyr who lives in a cave with a sea-female —

PHORMIO

I am weak: I care not what happens, give me a few grapes.

TISIAS

Well — pull up! (*He puts some grapes in the basket and holds it breast-high.*) Don't eat the seeds, they give melancholia. I have left a crust of biscuit and a hare's thigh, also a crow which I found on the headland not quite finished by a young fox. What! (*At this point he catches sight of Bacchylides and drops the basket.*) Help! Heavens, we are bewitched! Save yourself! It is upon us, — Neptune is upon us!

(*Exit running, enter Bacchylides.*)

BACCHYLIDES

The soothsayer! I thought so! Aglaia warned me, or I should have fainted outright

with antagonism. He has the jaw of the starving jackal! Behold his lair, his filthy food, his knuckle bones: the island is full of game. And where is the vampire, the swelled Phormio? And where is the trunk of gold goblets Aglaia speaks of? Here's a couple of Ulysses' swine indeed, with their snouts in gold pots!

PHORMIO. (*Aside.*)

If I fall not off through this trembling and weakness, I vow a gold pillar to Neptune. I will reform, and I will tell all.

BACCHYLIDES

Now what would Orpheus do here? Must he always sing? Must he charm with death in his throat, play only because play he must, like the dying swan? No! No! I am more than a poet. I will catch this fox Tisias alive, and I will do it by means of a stringed instrument.

(*Lays down his lyre, produces some cord, and exit.*)

PHORMIO

Poor Tisias!

(*Enter Leon and Aglaia.*)

LEON

Behold yon skeleton of noblest pine
Devoured by the gray and druid moss.
Lies he not like some rich old senator
Felled by his reverend vices to the earth
And outlined in corruption?

AGLAIA

Where he stood
A gap is left among his greener mates.

LEON

And lo, they too! The legacy of theft
Hangs on their living lips.

AGLAIA

The trees are wonderful.
But have you seen the western stand of cedars
That flaunts against the sunset those rich flags
Roughened with tiny cones of yellow gold —
As if they held their babies up to view —
Till sinking Phœbus kiss them?

LEON

Bacchylides protests that all this soil
Has somehow drunk the mind of vanished man,
Which flushes it to pathos.

AGLAIA

He's a poet:
We must do something for Bacchylides.

LEON

How he would laugh to hear it.

AGLAIA

Why to hear it?
The poet is the easiest man to help.

LEON

What! He's the only man one cannot help!

AGLAIA

Hear me: I'll teach thee how to treat a bard.
Leave him his liberty, but give him gold.
Heed him at all times — only when he's cross
Neglect him; but the instant he relents
Forgive him and renew the old caress.
Swear he is always great and always right —

And all his songs are always excellent:
Kneel to his judgment. You will spoil a man
But make an artist happy.

LEON

Yes, my love —
All this is true, I see, but never *easy*.

PHORMIO. (*Aside.*)

Oh monstrous! See if this little stripling here has not taken up with the first island woman he meets. And he so lovelorn over the little priestess that the scrub women of the temple pitied his case, and all our discipline was corrupted out of sympathy for his tragedy. Out on thee! Libertine! Dost thou respect nobody? Now that thou and thy Athenian have arrived we shall have cooing enough I warrant. Two wood doves! And Aglaia in her ocean grave! But there is more heart in *him* than in Tisias, and I must have food. I will groan like an earth spirit. (*Groans.*)

AGLAIA

Hist! What was that?

(*Phormio groans again.*)

LEON

There, again!

AGLAIA. (*To Leon.*)

Why, it is Phormio, of course. Didn't Tisias tell me that he had him in safety ever since I threw my clothes in the sea? We must pretend that I am the sea-cow which Neptune sent to frighten the mares of my cousin Hippolytus. Wait! I understand this tree-climbing sloth

better than thou. Do thou listen to me now without smiling, and go out when I tell thee to. Then, on my signal, when thou art outside and on the farther side of this tree, and when he is in the trance of my song, do thou rush in, making a noise like a sea-cow. This will shake him from his perch.

LEON

How can I do that? What noise?

AGLAIA

Go! Go! Make a noise — like — like Cyclops in love and weeping and telling his love to his Mother Earth: at the same time drinking out of a bucket of buttermilk.

LEON

How?

AGLAIA

Go, go! A sea-cow is easy enough — But wait —
(*In a false voice.*)
No, no,
Young sir, you are a saucy boy!
I'll not consent: you shall not kiss my fin,
Or rest your dreamy eyes upon my hair.
I am the sea-cow sent in Phormio's wake,
To charm him to destruction. I've no time
For genuflections. Go, thou naughty child,
Before my sister comes with reedy tusk
And bears thee seaward. I must sing him down
And she will bear him off. Go, hide thyself.
(*Then very sweet and leering.*)
And come again, sweet elf, this afternoon.
(*Exit Leon.*)

(*She takes the lyre and sings.*)

I

Far in the mist, rocked in the rain,
A rough seafisher's little skiff
Is battling bravely home again
To the cottage on the cliff.

But the long sea-lying open reef,
With the rocks that sink and rise,
Has bared the bosom of its grief
To the light of the evening skies;
And three salt maids from under seas
Throw stinging strains upon the breeze
And sweet delirious eyes.

II

Did the wind shift before it fell?
There is no wind at all.
And the young fisher knoweth well
The tide that soon must fall:

He knoweth the long, low, open reef,
With the rocks that fall and rise,
And the bosom of his rocky grief
Is bared to the evening skies.
And he dreads the maids from under seas,
Their stinging strains upon the breeze,
And their delirious eyes.

III

The tiller of his mind doth swing
As aimless as the sea;
He careth naught for anything
But a dream in his heart hath he:

Of a long sea-lying, open reef,
With rocks that sink and rise,
And purge their bosom of its grief
In the light of the evening skies.
And of three maids of under seas,
Their soothing strains, their melodies,
And their celestial eyes.

(*She makes a signal. A noise without, as of a sea-cow coming through the jungle. Aglaia screams.*)

PHORMIO

Help! Help! (*Falls out of the tree amid a crashing of branches. Enter Leon.*) O Leon, young prince Leon, save me! The god Poseidon is chasing me with his cow.

LEON

Get up and be a man. The god Poseidon, whose lying, hypocritical priest thou hast been, will punish thee. I will not save thee. Thou hast blasphemed thy god, betrayed thy King, and plotted against a holy priestess. What punishment remains for thee I know not.

PHORMIO

But this cow!

AGLAIA

The cow, Phormio, is a cow of the mind. The cow is thy conscience.

PHORMIO

My conscience! I praise God. My conscience, only my conscience. (*Begins to eat.*)

(*Enter Bacchylides with Tisias, who is ensnared with the cord.*)

BACCHYLIDES

It is not a noble or royal game to hunt the jackal: I never read of it in Persian history. But it will do. See if we have not each a full bag —

I from the brake and thou from the skies;
This is the game which our island supplies.

Now, all forward! We will reduce these jailbirds to ethical proportions by good discipline in a rocky chamber. (*To Phormio.*) Fie, thou filthy swine! must you be ever eating — even in the act of discovery and public condemnation?

AGLAIA

Bacchylides, dear Bacchylides, they have been punished already greatly. Gently, Bacchylides. Remember that we too are castaways.

(*Exeunt.*)

ACT III

SCENE II—THE SHORE OF THE ISLAND

(*Enter the King and Queen in custody of the Mitylenian general, Canchrax. Glaucus and Io are following.*)

CANCHRAX

Your Majesties, I leave you on the strand,
Fulfilling the bad duty laid upon me
Not without tears. The Lords of Mitylene
Devise it so. I humbly ask forgiveness.

KING

To grant forgiveness
Is the last act of dying royalty:
I would I could forgive thy masters, too.

QUEEN. (*To Canchrax.*)

It is an act of treason, not of war,
By which we perish. And I do not wonder
That you, a soldier, weep your hand in it.
Our servants were suborned, the town surprised.

KING. (*To Queen.*)

The man but does his duty: do not chide him;
And keep your comment till we are alone.

QUEEN

I'm a plain woman, who was once a queen,
And now may speak her mind. But you, my lord,

You, who despise all kingship and have mocked
it,
Do now adopt a kind of majesty
In putting off the crown.

KING. (*Smiling.*)
Well said, my love,—
I wish to throw a glamour on the past
By showing that I understood the pose
Though I disdained to use it seriously:
'Tis now delightful trifling.
(*To Canchrax.*) Go, good sir,
Tell your employers you have left the King
More master of his leisure and his mind
Than when you found him. Here is happiness.
His boyhood dreamed of this, and his old
age
Takes it as blessing. Thank the Mitylenes
For bringing back green woods into the world,
This forest by-road, and the broken screens
That lead it to the sea.
(*He turns his back on Canchrax and talks to the Queen in dumb show.*)

CANCHRAX. (*To Glaucus.*)
Glaucus, I pity thee.

GLAUCUS.
I neither ask thy pity
Nor dread thine hate.

CANCHRAX.
Comrade, adieu.

GLAUCUS.
Call me not comrade: and for thine adieux,
Address them to the sun; for thou dost die

Even in leaving me. I see the gash
Of death across thy brow.

CANCHRAX

How? Dost thou jest in chains?
My duty's done.

(*Exit.*)

KING. (*To Queen.*)

If I had done some crime we might be sad,
But, being innocent, we must be glad.
I ever took *that* kingdom as a show,
Then why not this?

QUEEN

Unless we starve—

KING

Look there!
Men do not starve where goats have left a track
Among the vines of berries red and black.
Besides, the food we have for some few days;
And next, a humble dwelling we must raise
And live like shepherds. We must tune our moods
To the sharp savor of poetic foods,
Whereby our senses, growing less perverse,
May see new wonders in the universe,
And learn, perchance, what marvels here belong.

(*Enter Myrmo, who goes to the shore and picks up seashells.*)

Already has the strand become a song
That tells of fairies. Mark his doughty fist!
There's a crab-cruncher to drive off the crows
And take the spoils himself!

QUEEN

The blessed darling! Let us make no noise,
But sit like statues by the lapping waves,
And see what he will do.

(*Myrmo presently sees the King, Queen, and Glaucus; starts, runs away, returns, and finally brings them oysters; then exit, running.*)

KING

If we would know how kind the creatures are
We have but not to fright them. Lo, this kid,
Who never yet saw man or womankind,
Is trustful as an angel.

GLAUCUS

Is this real?
They say that men in famine see strange sights,
Our brains being fodder to our appetites;
And, as the brain grows light, being fed upon,
These apparitions float about in the sun.

IO. (*Without.*)

It's more than mortal can bear — and the fire blistering my eyes for them.

KING

Here comes my pain. I begged you to discharge her while we had the power. Now it's too late.

(*Enter Io.*)

IO

Your Majesties will ask General Glaucus to keep out of my kitchen. I've enough with the cockroaches and the beachroaches without hav-

ing all the land crabs and the soldier crabs to come and peep into my pots.

GLAUCUS

What dost thou mean, termagant! Your Majesty, I will walk and examine the isle. If this fury has some complaint against me, I leave my case in your hands.

(*Exit.*)

QUEEN

The General must keep out of any part of the island that she calls her kitchen.

KING

What a precise knowledge of our household the enemy must have had, that they banish this woman with us. There's malice!

QUEEN

Ingrate! She has almost housed and fed us already. She has a dinner of three courses —

IO

Four, your Majesties—oysters roasted, with wild celery soup, lobsters broiled, a codfish I caught myself, some flag roots stewed with parsley, and fruit enough to make market-day in Troezene.

QUEEN

And she has laid out your rugs in a parlor under the bank, where you may sleep after eating.

KING

She has her uses.

QUEEN

While you talk, she works. Uses indeed!

Io

Will your Majesties do me the favor to speak to Master Glaucus? He has an impertinent eye in his head.

Queen

Yes; I will speak to him myself.

Io. (*Self-consciously.*)

I shall need some help with the dishes.

King

Solitude breeds wit. Dishes! What dishes? Seashells a foot across, I suppose. Throw them into the salt water!

Queen

I think Io must be having some visions also.

Io

Visions, is it? I had no meaning to tell your Majesties, but to keep them for a surprise. See what I found under a bank!

(*Exit and re-enters with the gold vessels.*)

King

What!

Queen

These are no dishes.

King

Somewhere have I seen
Vessels like these: but where, I have forgot.
They are the sacred dishes of a god,
Archaic, holy, and significant.
Such as within Dodona's shadowy glooms
Have dreamed for centuries. I cannot name him,
But some divinity has hallowed these —

Pan, Dionysus, — some informing god, —
Perhaps this island's very deity;
For sure a leafy prodigal is here,
Rustling beneath this thick luxuriance,
Who heaves his joy of life upon the air.

(*To Io.*)

You must not use them, lay them up again.

Io

As soon as I saw that peeking Master Glaucus coming down the path, I hid them.

(*Exit Io, enter Glaucus.*)

Glaucus

Your Majesties, I give you leave to doubt, —
I doubt myself, my sight and senses all —
But I have seen a god upon our island!

King

What!

Queen

Speak out!

Glaucus

If great Apollo in his jeweled car
May visit mortal sight, I've seen the god;
Or else 'twas Dionysus, drunk with life,
Guiding his lynxes or wild beasts subdued —
I know not which — attended by his suite,
Hermes and Ariadne and young satyrs,
And reveling demigods — I cannot name them —
But gods, as clear as is Olympus' peak
At sunrise. By their dress and walk, they're gods,
And by the lack of mortal habitation,

And by the radiance of the polished cloud
Surrounds them in their progress. Backed with blue
Upon the rising knoll, it rolls them on.

QUEEN

Zeus the preserver, shield us!

KING

Which way steered they?

GLAUCUS

Down the soft hillside, through the hazel copse.

KING

This way, this way?

GLAUCUS

It seemed so —

KING

This is the god whose goblets we beheld —
'Tis best we step aside!

(*King, Queen, and Glaucus step aside. Enter Leon and Aglaia, hand in hand, leading a procession. Behind them Bacchylides riding in a kind of small chariot and driving Tisias and Phormio before him. Bacchylides carries his lyre and wears his wreath. Tisias and Phormio are dressed as the mythological sins, Cunning and Sloth. They are on all fours and are decorated with vines and other symbols. Myrmo, bearing a thyrsus, attends the team and helps Bacchylides to control the restive animals.*)

BACCHYLIDES

Around the island we in triumph go,
To make a penance for these wicked men,

Three times revolving with our circling show
We purge the curving shore and rocky glen.
Halt! We must here perform our mystic rite.
Grovel, ye monsters born of Primal Night.

(*Bacchylides descends from the car.*)

Apollo! here we do present
Two sinners on this continent;
One for cunning craft indicted,
One by sloth and slumber blighted;
Both must lay them on the ground.
Kick them sure and beat them sound.
Myrmo, Myrmo, punish well
To save our island from their spell.

(*The beasts cover their faces and groan, while Myrmo beats them with his thyrsus and occasionally kicks them.*)

Now this nook is purified;
Onward, Myrmo, be our guide.

AGLAIA

We ought really to let them rest.

BACCHYLIDES

Vices rest! Never! Your true poet subdues the vices. He rolls them beneath his song. Think of Apollo and Marsyas, and have no pity. Poetry has no pity.

LEON

There I believe you. And we have recited your verses long enough.

BACCHYLIDES

Well, these villains are subdued; and I shall hang this car up in Apollo's temple at Delphi as the gift of a Greek king.

(*King, Queen, Glaucus, and Io come forward. All the characters hold up their hands in amazement and exclaim, "Oh wonderful!"*)

QUEEN

O Leon, what is this? My son I see.

LEON

Mother! (*Kneels.*)

KING

Leon returned! Leon!

(*Turning from one to another.*)

Aglaia! Bacchylides!
All the substance of my heart
Dressed in a masque of Saturn. I'll not weep,
Being too near to it, and lest the mist
Might bear ye off again.

(*Embraces Leon.*)

Leon, my boy,
When we are certified that it is thou,
Explain thy coming.

LEON

I cannot, sir.

BACCHYLIDES

If all will keep silence, I think I can explain. This is Aglaia, dressed in the fashion of the clime. These two are Tisias and Phormio — only they are reformed. Leon is there. I am here. In short — in short, it is truly we and truly ye; but the rest is uncertain. For how I came here I have forgotten, and how Aglaia came here I never knew, and how your Majesties came here remains in darkness. As for Myrmo, he was always here. And this,

I trust, is a clear, short statement of the facts.

KING

I thought ye to be gods —

QUEEN. (*Holding Leon fast.*)

Better than gods.

LEON

My father and my mother,
I must present you to my only love.

KING

All is most strange. I find myself again
Upon the puddly shore where thou wast rolled;
I think I hear the heaving of that sea
That whispered to the sunset of a maid,
An island, and a king. Thine eyes, Aglaia,
Look on me now as then, most lovingly.
I feel the godhead of mine ancestor
Ascending strongly through the heady brine.
He comes: stand all about: arrange yourselves
As at an audience.

(*They do so. Enter Neptune, the King kneels and holds up his hands.*)

KING

God of the Ocean, life behind my line
Declare thy purpose.

NEPTUNE

Here have I drawn you by the threads of fate,
Using no magic save the elements,
And the strong natural magic of yourselves.
Ye know not where ye are, nor how ye came:
Ye know not what ye would, nor where ye go.
Like children; or a company of players

That wander into one another's lives
And find their parts provided in a play,
So ye, controlled by the invisible,
Have circled to a close. I come to tell ye,
Your enemies are scattered on the blast:
Sunk in the ocean is proud Mitylene,
And every blasphemous lip is silent now.
Ye are awaited by a happy town,
To which your fleet shall float you joyously.
It stays upon the tide. I know ye all
And value; for within my glassy realm,
As in the mansions of the solid air,
Float the dark filaments of things that be.

(*To King.*)

Thou, blameless King, receive the great reward, —
A son as blameless; on thy heart I built
My temple, and on his, my citadel.

(*To Aglaia.*)

This foundling maid is an Ægean princess
Foredoomed to rule Troezene as its Queen.

(*To Leon.*)

Take her, Prince Leon, for her heart is thine.
And with her take the dowry of this isle.
'Tis Neptune's marriage gift, a twinkling star
New spangled on the sea. It raised its brow
Gently to greet a bride, within a league
Of thine enamored shore; and with it rose
That other star of love-in-piety
That in thy inward firmament doth blaze;
Both with one motion turn and are inlocked

With the great wheels of heaven. So live we all —
So the diurnal actions of the sky
Work out the gods' designs.

KING

(*Raising his hand to impose silence while the god withdraws. Exit Neptune.*)

No mortal voice must answer. He is gone
And we are left in wonder. What he spake
I do believe, although the proof of it
Lies in the piecing out of many fragments, —
Work for a winter's evening. O my friends,
Strong inward props to courage must we take
Seeing the gods do love us, and their loom,
Behind the shuttling conflict of events,
Weaves only justice.

LEON

Father, I perceive
With what a tenderness you viewed our love,
Seeming so stern.

AGLAIA

No, he seemed never stern.
I feared your mother more; but now, not so.

(*Gives her hand to the Queen.*)

QUEEN

Daughter, you have no need.
I had as heartfelt pangs about you both
As woman ever knew. Now is all saved.

AGLAIA

How now, Bacchylides, are you gloomy now that the storm is over?

BACCHYLIDES

Oh, aye, all is over now. I knew it would be so. It was too good to last. Now must we all return to humdrum. Our island is lost. Now that it is found it is lost; and all the delicate delights of it are soiled and explored. Fie! It is but a league from Troezene; there will be dirty children and music here on festival afternoons. I shall take my lyre and seek a new prince in misfortune; for I see nothing but comfort ahead here, and the decay of genius.

LEON

Not while we can preserve *thee*, Bacchylides.

AGLAIA

Not while hearts are warm in Troezene!

(*Enter sea-captain, mariners following.*)

CAPTAIN

The royal trireme awaits your Majesty.

KING

Ha! Is it so?

IO. (*Entering.*)

Dinner is served, your Majesties:
Upon the beach the banquet is set out.

KING

Good. We'll accept both offers — dinner first,
To which, good Master Captain, you shall come;
And after, in the trireme, to our home.

A FAMILY QUARREL

A PLAY FOR THE NURSERY IN TWO ACTS

CHARACTERS

COUNT HUGO, *a provincial noble of Piedmont*
SYLVIA, *his wife*
STARLING, *their elder boy, aged six*
ELFKIN, *their second boy, aged two*
PETRARCH, *the butler*
TWO NUNS
THE MONSTER
FAIRY

A FAMILY QUARREL

ACT I

SCENE I — THE PALACE

(Sylvia and Starling. Sylvia is before her dressing-glass. Starling is choosing jewels for her hair from a jewel box.)

SYLVIA

Give me the dewdrops; they remember me
Of my lank girlhood. Cool hypatica,
That underneath old winter's soaking leaves
Trims her shy toilet, shall not be more meek
Than I. I'll set a fillet on my head
Of beaded holly mixed with mistletoe;
The red and alabaster alternating,
Like fruits in stone or old mosaic glass,
Shall turn me to a picture. So he'll learn
He cannot chafe me.

STARLING

Mother, what's the matter?

SYLVIA

Ah, when a noble with a fairy weds,
All of their days are spent in bickering.
Your father, Starling, is the kind of man
Who thinks it honor to be born at home,
To have a son, to plow an ancient farm,

To own a wife, a cat, a Sunday suit,
To strut and fret and eat, and call me his.
All have I borne because thou wast my son.
Thy fairy nature, copied after mine,
Could never to his grossness be debased.
But, dearest heart, thy brother is not so.
Our baby Elfkin is of different clay,
And father spoils the child, who daily grows
More like a monster, selfish, rude, and raw.
O Starling, we must save him.

STARLING

Send papa away!

SYLVIA

Yes, if we could;
Leave him awhile in some enchanted wood
Wandering alone. If grandmamma were here,
My mother, the green witch —

STARLING

Couldn't we all die, ourselves, to punish him?

SYLVIA

My mother, the green witch, might help us now.

(*Enter Count Hugo with Elfkin by the hand, a dirty but vigorous child of two. The child has a patch of court plaster on his forehead, and his pocket is full of billets of wood, corks, and other rubbish.*)

HUGO

Women are fools. It's men who rule the world.
(*To Elfkin.*) Shall we go see the pigs?

ELFKIN

Yes, pigs.

SYLVIA. (*To Hugo.*)
You'll leave that child to play among the pigs,
As you did yesterday?

HUGO
Better than leave him with a jewel box,
Or playing on some waiting-woman's lap.
My ancestors have hunted the wild boar,
Within their forests, for eight hundred years;
And boys of manly spirit ever are
At home with pigs. My boy shall be a man,
And not a baby.

SYLVIA
My child, your head is hurt —

HUGO
He cracked his head
Against the cellar door.
(*To Elfkin.*) Don't let them touch it.
It is a manly wound.

ELFKIN. (*To his mother.*)
Gettaway!
Gettaway! (*Throws something at her.*)

HUGO
Aye, there's the wolf at bay!
The very image of my grandfather
Old Wolf-at-Bay, green eyes and bulging brow,
And born with teeth. Young Spear-the-Boar,
Shall we go see the pigs?

ELFKIN
Yes, pigs.

STARLING
Go 'way, you horrible man! You bad papa!

You frighten my mamma. Some witch will
come
And lose you in the wood, or kill us all.
Go 'way, you cruel man!

HUGO

And thus you set the child against his father?

SYLVIA

It was the father first assailed the child.
Hugo, beware! some punishment will fall.
I am a witch's daughter and I call
Upon my mother's minions for revenge.
Mother! Avenge me! If I die to-night,
Avenge your daughter on this dreadful man,
Who ruins both his sons and kills his wife.
Revenge! Revenge!

MONSTER. (*Without.*)

Who calls?

SYLVIA

Hark! What was that?

HUGO

It was a cat that mewed
In answer to a hen that cackles here.

SYLVIA

You heard it?

MONSTER. (*Without.*)

Who calls?

SYLVIA

There again an awful voice!
Hugo, it's coming! Some calamity!
Hold, hold the children fast, — a devil comes.

MONSTER. (*Entering.*)

Who called me?

SYLVIA. (*In terror.*)
No one! No one called you here —

HUGO
Sylvia, you're mad, your staring eyeballs glare;
And yet there's nothing there.

SYLVIA
(*On her knees before the Monster.*)
Spare them, oh spare them! Hugo, to your knees
And pray for expiation.

HUGO
You are mad.
I see no danger in a woman's fears.
This is hysteria. Come along, my boy.

ELFKIN. (*To the Monster.*)
Gettaway! Gettaway!
(*Throws something at it.*)

SYLVIA
He sees it! It's the Rachert: it is sent
On messages of vengeance. Hold him back!
(*She endeavors to get between the child and the Monster, but Hugo holds her back.*)

HUGO
You'd have the boy a milksop like your own?
There's nothing there, you fool! Elfkin, go on
And show Mamma our boy is not afraid.

ELFKIN. (*Advancing boldly.*)
Gettaway! Gettaway! Gettaway!
(*As he approaches the Monster, it suddenly puts a big black sack like a coal sack straight down over the child, enfolds him in its voluminous person, and vanishes.*)

SYLVIA

Help! Help! He's gone. (*She falls unconscious.*)

HUGO

She's in a faint.

(*Hugo and Starling kneel by her, one on each side.*)

The woman's going mad.
Starling, go fetch a glass of water,
And tell old Petrarch. He will understand.
(*Calls.*) Petrarch, Petrarch, —

(*Enter Petrarch.*)

Your mistress has a seizure; get some salts
And bring her round. Come, Elfkin, to the pigs.
Elfkin, we'll find the old boar's hiding-place,
And where the falcon died, when I was young.
I'll show the very spot. The eagle's nest
We'll find and six young eaglets, Elfkin.
(*To Petrarch.*) Where's the lad?
We were all here — and suddenly she fell,
Imagining she saw some fantasy,
Some fairy monster. Then she cried, "The Rachert,"
And fell upon her knees.

PETRARCH

It is the Rachert!
The Monster that takes children from their homes.

HUGO

You superstitious ass! Send me the boy,
You've hidden him yourself. It is a trick!
The whole of you are in it. Give the boy!

(*He throttles Petrarch.*)

Give me the boy, and let your mistress lie.
The boy, the boy, — give me my boy, I say!

PETRARCH. (*With great solemnity.*)

Sir, do not choke me. I am powerless.
Someone has called upon the Angel Death.
Pray God it be but one he takes away.
Perhaps the lady, — see her leaden eye
And pallid cheek.

HUGO

The Angel Death?
'Tis nothing; she has fainted. Get some water.
(*Petrarch and Hugo are occupied over the lady.*)

STARLING

Where is Elfkin? I'll find him! I'll find him!
(*He runs toward the door, is met by the Monster, who silently makes away with him by the same method. Neither Hugo nor Petrarch observe the disappearance.*)

PETRARCH. (*To Hugo.*)

See, she revives. What pain is in her brow.
Not rage, but humbleness must help us now.
(*Curtain.*)

END OF ACT I

(*Enter Fairy, as Chorus, before the curtain.*)

FAIRY

I am a spirit out of Fairyland,
And I have leave to walk the nurseries
And tell the news to babies everywhere;
For into Fairyland was Elfkin brought,
And Starling too. The fairies keep them safe
Until the foolish parents shall turn good.

Foolish papa, who spoiled his little boy!
Foolish mamma, who called the Monster down!
They must be punished. Oh unhappy case!
They think their children dead. They dress in
black,
And dry their tears on black-edged handker-
chiefs,
And cry all day and say that they were wrong.
And both must suffer till they find the truth.
The father must be brought to see his boy
Just as he is, an ugly little whelp,
A savage, insolent, neglected child.
And oh, the mother, too, must see herself.
She was too proud and over-delicate,
And spoiled her Starling, too. Oh now she sees
That little Starling needed his papa.
Now she is tender, and her memory
Shows her an icy image of herself
That makes her weep afresh.

ACT II

(*Hugo and Sylvia. A sparsely furnished room, two small tables at right and left center of stage. Both parents are dressed in deep black.*)

HUGO

I have consented; but it is for your sake, Sylvia; I will adopt a child, since we have lost our own children.

SYLVIA

And I know that nothing else will satisfy you, Hugo. Since the death of Elfkin, you have been like a broken creature. You have lost your son. You have lost your companion. You have lost your occupation. Your nature needs a child. You cannot live without one. You must adopt one. Hugo, dear, I was wrong to thwart you. I was wrong not to see how deep a tie there was between you and Elfkin. And I set Starling against you, too! And now we have lost them, — lost them forever — ! (*Weeps.*)

HUGO

I will do it for your sake, Sylvia; but I cannot bear to think of any stranger child's taking the place of my noble, manly boy, my handsome, spirited, talented Elfkin, who was a joy

to everyone. The servants loved him even when he plagued them. This new child will remind me of Elfkin — that is the worst.

SYLVIA

But that will pass away, my Hugo. And the happiness of having a child in the house once more will remain to us both.

HUGO

I have consented for your sake.

SYLVIA

(*Rings the bell. Enter Petrarch.*)

Petrarch, those ladies from the convent called?

PETRARCH

(*Looking from one to the other.*)

I have Madame's permission to relate?

HUGO

Yes, Petrarch, you may speak.

PETRARCH

They came again
And say that they have found a proper child;
His teeth are good, his arms and legs are straight,
He has an eye of fire and a fist
As hard as a potato. And his spirit!
It is the image of our former saint.

SYLVIA

But have you seen him, Petrarch?

PETRARCH

Hush! The nuns
Hide him in a cage. I had a peep at him.
They wait your pleasure in the Servants' Hall,

And while they wait they eat. The kitchen shelves
Are cleared of food, and what they cannot eat
They put in baskets for the parish poor.
And, if your excellence takes my advice,
You'll see them soon.

SYLVIA

Poor creatures! Are they thin?

PETRARCH

As fat as seals,
With hands like fins and eyes like billiard balls;
They frighten me.

HUGO

Let them come in.

PETRARCH. (*Announcing.*)

Ladies, the Count and Countess do receive you.

(*Enter two nuns, short and stout, with linen caps very wide, their hands folded upon their stomachs. They enter with the greatest aplomb, curtsey suddenly to Sylvia, and station themselves one on either side of Hugo. Hugo is in the center of the stage, facing the audience. They also face the audience and stand very close to Hugo. Their heads are fixed, but they roll their eyes at each other significantly across Hugo, as if to say "We've got him."*)

HUGO. (*To Sylvia.*)

Save me at need.

SYLVIA

You must speak to them.
(*To Petrarch.*) Petrarch, wait outside.
(*Exit Petrarch.*)

HUGO

You have a child to sell?

FIRST NUN

No!

SECOND NUN

Never!

HUGO

You have a child to give?

FIRST NUN

Not that either!

SECOND NUN

Not at all!

HUGO

Can I get the child?

FIRST NUN

Yes.

SECOND NUN

Of course.

HUGO

By giving money?

FIRST NUN

Yes, money.

SECOND NUN

Money, certainly.

HUGO

How much?

FIRST NUN

Oh, oh, oh, one.

SECOND NUN

Oh, oh, oh, one.

HUGO

One thousand?

(*First Nun nods.*)

(*Second Nun nods.*)

HUGO

The child is of good family?

FIRST NUN

No, not very.

SECOND NUN

As good as yours.

HUGO

Strong?

(*They nod.*)

HUGO

Handsome?

(*They shake their heads.*)

HUGO

Good tempered?

(*They look at each other as if to say, "Who shall begin, you or I?"*)

FIRST NUN

That's as it may be.

SECOND NUN

It may be —

FIRST NUN

It may be a baby
Takes after the father;
And who then can say
If he's tempered that way.
If he's like dear Papa,

It grows hard to decide.
When the father's a monster of family pride,
And the baby's a pig with a hornet inside,
Who can say which is best?
Who can tell us the test?
For the father had rather
The baby resembled that horrible pest,
That curse to mankind, —
For all fathers are blind.

(*Very conclusively, turning sharply to Second Nun.*)

Isn't it so, sister?

SECOND NUN. (*Very conclusively.*)

ALL parents are blind.

(*During the foregoing monody Hugo has made an attempt to slip out by moving across the room; but the sisters have stuck close to him.*)

HUGO

Save me, sweet wife, I am caught in a lock.
These women, like oysters, cling fast to the rock.
I'm stiff in each arm and I'm under a charm!
They are marching me off to the stake or the block.
O love of my life,
Save me, sweet wife.

FIRST NUN

That's as it may be, —

SECOND NUN

It may be —

FIRST NUN

It may be a baby
Takes after the mother;

And who then can say
If he's tempered that way.
If he's like dear Mamma,
It grows hard to decide.
When the mother's a goose,
With her head on one side,
And the baby's a darling,
As can't be denied.
But a puppet, a plaything, the toy of her mind,
She spoils him and pets him, oh wicked, unkind!
But all mothers are blind.

(*Very conclusively, turning sharply to Second Nun.*)

Isn't it so, sister?

SECOND NUN. (*Very conclusively.*)

ALL parents are blind.

(*During this, as before, Hugo has attempted to escape.*)

HUGO

Save me, sweet wife, I am caught in their grip.
These horrible sirens will not let me slip.
I'm stiff in each arm and I'm under a charm,—
They are marching me off to do me some harm.
O love of my life,
Save me, sweet wife!

SYLVIA

O husband, their magic is falling on me,
I feel myself chained like a rock in the sea.
To help you I'd willingly forfeit my life,
But I'm turning to stone, and no good as a wife.
I can't stir a finger, I scarcely can moan,—
O husband, forgive me; I'm turning to stone.

FIRST NUN

(*To Hugo, somewhat snappishly.*)

Do you still want the boy?

HUGO

I want to get out.

SECOND NUN. (*To Sylvia.*)

Do you still want to help this unspeakable lout?

SYLVIA

Yes, yes. I would forfeit my soul for his sake.

SECOND NUN

Then stand by his side while the contract we make.

(*The nuns stand behind a table and place the parents one on each side. They then produce a large parchment.*)

FIRST NUN

This agreement means to say
That Hugo and his wife
Will take two children to their arms
And keep them all their life.

HUGO

No!

SYLVIA

Two! Must we take *two!*

FIRST NUN

One from her and one from me;
And if you make a fuss,
I'll change the two and make it three,
With one from both of us.

HUGO

Can't we see them beforehand?

First Nun

What a question! See them beforehand?
Did you ever hear
That parents chose their children out
Before they did appear?
You must be crazy, staring mad
To ask what is so clear.
Sign the paper, both of you —
It's what all parents have to do.
You must take them as they come,
All and some.
They may not have the finest wits,
Nor yet the fairest hue;
Though others think your boots misfits,
They're good enough for you.
They're good enough, and just enough, —
Just good enough for you.

Hugo

This is terrible! What beasts are they going to unload on us?

Sylvia

Oh, I'll love them all the more. They will at least be children — and we are so lonely.

Hugo

But to think of my beautiful, beautiful boy! And now comes some ugly common child.

(*Both parents sigh.*)

First Nun

Now, Petrarch, mind your eye.

Second Nun

Fetch the canaries.

(*Enter Petrarch bearing a large cage covered with brown holland. He sets it down on the table at left center of stage.*)

BOTH NUNS

Sing the song and chant the words;
Bring the cages, bring the birds.
Clip, clap, come tree, come try,
Open the door and let them fly.

(*They remove the cage and disclose Elfkin. He is dressed in the costume of Hercules, bare arms and legs, lion skin and club. His hair, which is the reddest kind of carrot-hair, rises in a stack above his brow and then falls to his waist behind his shoulders. He has horns. Petrarch takes the cage.*)

HUGO

A devil's own; an unholy monster; whose child can he be? What kind of people can they be who have had such a child as that? And to think of my handsome Elfkin!

ELFKIN

Gettaway all, both great and small,
Gettaway, gettaway, gettaway all!

(*Brandishes his club.*)

PETRARCH

Just like our dear boy.

HUGO

Petrarch, how dare you!

PETRARCH

Excuse me, sir.

HUGO

Did you ever see a child so detestable! I'm

ashamed to dislike any child; but really to see a child so like a pig —

ELFKIN

Yes, pigs. Go see pigs.

HUGO

They've trained him to imitate our lost beauty.

BOTH NUNS

It's well for mankind
That parents are blind;
For had they an eye,
They would let their brats die.

HUGO

He does look a little like Elfkin. What devilish cunning! And what a horrible punishment that we must forever be reminded of our cupid by this insect. He has the manners of a toad.

SECOND NUN

Petrarch, fetch the other canary.

SYLVIA

Oh, he's a darling all the same.

(*She approaches Elfkin.*)

ELFKIN

Gettaway all, both great and small,
Gettaway, gettaway, gettaway all.

(*Brandishes his club.*)

(*Enter Petrarch and sets another cage on the small table in right center of stage.*)

BOTH NUNS

Sing the song and chant the words;
Bring the cages, bring the birds.

Clip, clap, come tree, come try,
Open the door and let them fly.

(*They remove the cage and disclose Starling. He has a doll in his lap, a mob cap on one side of his head, and a Mercury staff in his hand. Petrarch takes the cage.*)

SYLVIA

What a cunning imp! But he's a sort of toy! A Greek imp, fit to hand Venus her pomatum pot. A bronze pair of tweezers to trim Psyche's lamp with. What an effeminate little angel! It's not a child at all.

HUGO

He looks like Starling.

SYLVIA

No. Starveling! Starveling! What a poor, timid creature! He should be sent to play with the villagers. He should be taught to trap animals and groom horses. He should be hardened. He needs to live with men and boys, open-air life, — freedom. His poor little muscles are like cobwebs — and what a lack-a-daisical eye, like a flower that droops. Hadn't he any father to take him out on walks and make him manly? Hadn't he a father?

(*The fairy appears at the back center, standing on a bench. The two nuns, who have been standing behind the tables, now stand in such a way as to make a pyramidal arrangement of the personages on the stage, the fairy being the apex. Petrarch stands at one side, still holding the cages.*)

FAIRY

Which of you parents was the most to blame,
Or fed his vanity with nicer meat,
Choosing the sensual morsel of self-pleasure
Out of the wholesome dish of parenthood?
Yes, ye have harmed them and have hurt yourselves
By using them as comrades in your tastes.
Was it for thee, thou rustic nobleman,
Whose education follows the grand tour
Of sporting seasons, to shut out the breath
Of gentle influence from our hedge-pig here?
Had he a mother, or was father Hodge
Father and mother both to infant Hodge?
And must our country's future be content
With vistas of illimitable Hodge, —
Unlettered offspring of unthinking sires, —
Trundling their ignórance about our lanes
And hiding in the hedge to shun the gaze
Of educated men!

(*To Sylvia.*)

And thou no less!
Because this boy resembled thee in something,
Thou took'st him for a genius. Woe upon thee!
Woe to the favorite child! His soul is drained
By devils in the night, that suck him dry.
Along his path a thousand traps are hid
That spring in manhood, yes, in after-life.
More men are crippled by a parent's love
Than by the wars. Take warning, both of ye!
Now have your eyes been opened, and ye see
The sorry thing a favorite child may be, —

A starvèd grape upon a blighted vine, —
And how, when parents quarrel, children pine.
Each of you is dependent on the other,
The father is as helpless as the mother.
It was to teach you this your children dear,
Your children, seemed to die, and yet were here.
Therefore rejoice! It is a rare event
When parents are let off a punishment.

WILFRED THE YOUNG

A DRAGON-PLAY FOR BOYS

CHARACTERS

King Draco

Claudias, *a Lord, his chief counsellor*

Leo, *an old philosopher, a retainer of the late King Cleombrotus*

Amyas, Euclid } *servants to Leo*

Wilfred the Young of Overseas, *a Knight*

Thekla, Dio } *children of the late King Cleombrotus*

Cephas, Eusebia } *friends of the children*

Simeon, *an old beggar*

Queen Dis, *an enchantress, sister to King Draco*

Lords and Ladies, *a Herald, a Pontifex, servants, peasants and townsfolk*

Act I, Scene 1, *the palace*
Act I, Scene 2, *outside old St. Agnes' Chapel*
Act II, Scene 1, *the palace*
Act II, Scene 2, *Wilfred's cabin*
Act II, Scene 3, *the palace*
Act III, Scene 1, *Wilfred's cabin*
Act III, Scene 2, *outside the Dragon's Cave*

WILFRED THE YOUNG

ACT I

SCENE I — THE PALACE

(*The King, Claudias, and Lords.*)

KING

One hundred in a twelvemonth, youths and maids,
The tender, blushing flowers of my realm
Has this foul dragon eaten. Add to that
The yearly tale of hero-hearted knights
Who move in gay procession, one by one,
In glistening hope and golden armor clad
Against the monster's jaws, — to sanctify
With whitening Christian bones his horrid cave.
My kingdom is unchilded; yet you say
The slaughter must go on.

CLAUDIAS

Not so, my liege.
I say it is a heavy ordinance
And we lie under it. Your people all
Grieve with your heart, and pour their tears with yours.
I saw but yesterday five tragic mothers
Bend with distracted grief above an urn
That should have held — but could not — their son's ashes.

KING

Heavy, heavy.

CLAUDIAS

And yet the time is near when more must go;
Already they are chosen by the lot.

KING

Who goes?

CLAUDIAS

Euphorion and old Alcides' son
(Two very worthless fellows, good my liege).
And, — I forget — 'twas nobody of note.
Ah! Those two children of our former King,
Cleombrotus' two children.

KING

The lame maid
That watches by the well?

CLAUDIAS

The same, my lord.

KING

Heavy, heavy dues,
That for my people's life I heavily,
Vainly pay out.

CLAUDIAS

Not vain, my lord; the sins of all are washed
Through this most necessary sacrifice,
Sweet in the eyes of heaven.

KING

Hath not the maid a brother that she tends?

CLAUDIAS

An idiot boy, my lord —

KING

The lot falls hard.

CLAUDIAS

The lot falls true, my liege.
They are the children of your enemy,
And with them dies a claim upon the throne.
For though but few dare say so, some dare think,
This idiot boy shall one day wear the crown,
And that no children shall be born to you
While this boy lives. Therefore, dear sir, I say
The finger of God's providence is here,
Condemning traitors.

KING

(*Who has been nodding with mechanical and sad assent, now looks piously toward heaven.*)
So may it prove!

CLAUDIAS. (*To the rest.*)

The King is sad; he suffers for the poor.
The orphan's prayer unmans him, holy man.
Shall we not fetch some joy, some merriment
To shake the oppressive rancor of his thoughts?

(*To King.*)

Good sir, be comforted; what human fate
Was e'er exempt from human suffering, —
From error, evil, accident, disease, —
The tolls we pay in passing Cerberus
To reach the Elysian Fields? What man grows old,
Nay, reaches middle life without the loss
Of child, or maiden wife, or early hope?
And if his limbs are sound, 'tis but a mask;
His teeth, his hair, his talk, betray the tax.
So of our kingdom's curse, this dragon-pest,

That eats our children; if he ate them not,
Would they not die of small-pox, perish in wars,
Which, God be praised, we know not in this age
Under the even justice of our King?

KING

Enough, good Claudias. I will be ruled.

CLAUDIAS. (*To the others.*)

You hear, he will be ruled.

(*Murmurs of approval.*)

FIRST COURTIER

Will your Majesty be as merry as at the last tournament?

SECOND COURTIER

Shall we have sports again, your Majesty?

CLAUDIAS

Aye, he consents. (*Murmurs of approval.*)

THIRD COURTIER

More sports, O Jupiter, what joy!

FIRST COURTIER

There's a new youth come to try his skill at a game of jack-straws with the dragon before the cave on Wednesday morning. There'll be some sport in that.

SECOND COURTIER

He comes from over sea and calls himself Wilfred.

THIRD COURTIER. (*To King.*)

I have a petition to your Majesty; it is that no one shall be allowed to wear mourning for more than three weeks for any brother, child,

father, grandfather, or sweetheart eaten by the dragon. It spoils all sport, this weeping; and for what? Old relatives that —

A Voice

I have some that I could spare. (*Laughter.*)

King

Nay, gentlemen, hear me. It shall be as you desire. But first, to still some clamors of the people, and perhaps too of mine own conscience, I have sent to consult old Leoncino the philosopher.

First Courtier

I thought he was dead long ago.

Second Courtier.

Not dead, but under ground. He lives in the crypt under St. Agnes' Chapel. They will hardly be able to find him among the other bones.

Third Courtier

What, the tutor to the late tyrant's children?

A Voice

A harmless old menial!

King

Softly, softly, gentlemen. I have thought well to consult him; and I beg you to treat him with respect when he comes.

First Courtier

Certainly, your Majesty.

Second Courtier

We will treat him, your Majesty, with such courteous contempt as the silken wolf-hound

shows to the toothless old St. Bernard who limps out of his kennel at the smell of bread crumbs. (*Laughter.*)

CLAUDIAS

Beware, spaniels! Old dogs bite.

A VOICE

Old dogs never bite puppies. (*Laughter.*)

SERVANT. (*Announcing.*)

Leo, the philosopher, waits upon your Highness for an audience.

KING

Bid him come in.

THIRD COURTIER

It is the first act in the new revels!

(*Enter Leo, supported by his servants Amyas and Euclid. He is a very old man and blinks at the light.*)

KING

Leo, although thy leaning to our rule
Has not been loyal, we have suffered thee
To live unvexed within our palace walls,
Nursing the past, because thou wast a noble,
And thine attachment to mine uncle's kin
Most natural.

CLAUDIAS

It was an act, my lord,
More like the sovereign clemency of God
Than human mildness!

KING

(*With a gesture commanding silence to Claudias.*)

Had I been cruel,
The path of justice pointed to the block.

LEO. (*To his servants.*)
What says he?

KING
Justice, old Leo, justice required your death.

LEO. (*To his servants.*)
My eyes are dim: I cannot read the word.

FIRST COURTIER
This is the oldest owl in Thrace. (*Laughter.*)

KING
Silence! Claudias, make clear the antechamber.
(*Claudias does so in dumb show.*)
Shall I be obeyed!
(*Exeunt courtiers.*)
(*To the servants.*) Give him a chair. Go,
Claudias with the rest.
I have a thread in this old ruffian's life
Which none of you doth share.
(*Exit Claudias.*)
He cannot speak.
Too many listening presences oppress him.
Darken the chamber, so. (*They do so.*)
A candle there!
(*A lighted candle is brought.*)
See, it restores him: he is easier.
Speak to him, some of you whose voice he knows.

AMYAS
Master, what see you?
(*To the King.*) Only thus he talks,
By talking to himself. You must not speak.
Master, how goes your dreaming?

LEO

Things to me
Before they happen are as clearly seen
As in a silver midnight clouds are bright.
But when the daylight dawns and shows the deed
My eyes are blinded.

KING. (*Aside.*)

Good. I'll use my own
To see what's in the world, and yours, good Leo,
Shall tell us what's to come.
(*To servant.*) Urge him, Amyas.
Hush, he begins.

LEO

I saw the heavens ablaze with countersigns,
Flags signaling, and armies in the sky.
Arcturus draws his arrow to the head;
And o'er the dragon's cavern on the hill
A starry pageant shines.

KING. (*Aside.*)

The dragon's fate!
This is the very key to all my fears.
For I do fear my dynasty doth stand
Upon the life and tenure of the dragon;
And if the dragon die, —

LEO

A robe of fire
Enwraps a many-pinnacled pavilion
Or casket-shaped cathedral made of light;
And, from the furry fringes of the robe,
Low-hanging lamps attend the evening star
Across our hilltop —

KING

Show me, show me, Leo!

LEO

Who be you?

KING. (*After a moment's pause.*)

I am your ancient master, your good friend,
Cleombrotus, whose children you brought up.
The King Cleombrotus —

LEO

Cleombrotus!

KING. (*Aside.*)

I must deceive him or he will not speak.
(*To Leo.*) Cleombrotus, your master.

LEO

Is it thou?
I have awaited thee, O Master mine!
Be it in the spirit, or beyond the world,
Where past and future mingle, I behold
Thee and thy children, not as now they are,
But radiant, restored, and re-established:
The rightful rulers of a happy race.
And this last filthy tyrant swept away!

(*Amyas and Euclid fall on their knees.*)

AMYAS

Mercy, your Highness! Hold us not to blame
For these unmeaning ravings of old age.
We knew it not! Nor are accountable.
No more is he, nor spoke not so before,
But ever praised your Highness' nobleness;
And this bad, frothy treason on his lips
Portends his coming death.

KING

Silence, you fools!
To hear this secret have I fatted him,
And starved myself. Which dog of you shall bark
Dies by my hand. And, but I dare not stir,
I'd kill you now for pastime. Make him go on.

AMYAS

What do you see, my lord?

EUCLID

Aye, father dear, what vision do you see?

LEO

My master, the old King, in apparition,
Shedding his benediction over me.
Ye cannot see him! O thou glorious truth,
That shin'st alone upon the eye of faith,
Seeming but mock and laughter to the world;
Yet being life and substance to all else,
The bone and basis of reality.
Cleombrotus, the end of ill draws nigh.
The dragon sickens, and his meted life
Clanks to its close.

KING. (*In a constrained voice.*)

How so? What dragon mean you? For to us
Who live in limbo, no news penetrates,
And, save the straggling beams that light a dungeon,
Shards of a broken world, we know no news.

LEO

News, wouldst thou, news? Thou knowest nothing?

KING

Nothing except the tomb.

LEO

O grisly fate!
Thou who didst make thy children into gods,
How canst thou hear their present sufferings
Without a heart-break! Thekla, thy sweet girl,
That hung upon the brink of maidenhood
Enamoring the current stream of the world
With her unconscious petals, was shot through
With Phœbus' shaft. She sickened to a stalk,
And now, a crook-back, hobbles through the
streets.
The unpaved alleys know her, and those banks
Where peasant women knit along the quay.
Mothers do wince to watch the little maid,
Holding her rag of broken motherhood
Above thy witless son.

KING

Oh very piteous!
Came there a dragon after I had died?

LEO

A dragon? Yes, thy murderer the King,
The false and wicked Draco. With him came
His soul that is a dragon; and that soul
Assumed its visible shape, and on our hill
Burrowed its horrid cave. That frightful beast
Is Draco's soul. It lives and dies in him;
And when it dies, dies Draco.

KING. (*Aside.*)

There spake God!
There fell the ax, the thunder-stroke of truth.
I dreamed of this! I knew it, I have guessed it:
And, but I had the wit to find this out,

Here had I perished; but I vow to heaven
That dragon *shall not die!*
Say, ancient man —
(*He checks himself and assumes the proper tone.*)
Father, most reverend sir, most holy friend,
Tell me once more. That dragon, shall he die?

LEO

His conqueror doth stand without the gate!
And his black vitals shall bedew the ground
Outside his cave.

KING. (*With fury.*)

And I say they shall not!
Ho! bar the door!
(*Enter men-at-arms.*)
Take this old fool to his kennel.
(*To Amyas and Euclid.*) Not you two!
Ye must be housed awhile with me, my friends,
To see what thrift is found within your skins.
Sharing kings' secrets is a serious game,
Though played by innocent men.
(*To guard.*) Take them away.
Thus do I save my life and keep my state:
Foreknowledge makes us masters of our fate.

ACT I

SCENE II

(*The outside of old St. Agnes' Chapel, a decayed Gothic building in the suburbs. Wilfred in armor. He is sitting on a bench or an old tombstone.*)

WILFRED

Here have I watched since midnight; now the dawn
Turns on his pillow, and gray, ancient walls
Unfold their welcome to the morning air.
Surely some guidance led me to the spot,
So near I feel to God and to my quest.
But that his name stands writ among the damned,
I should account King Draco a good king;
Yet in the trumpet-call that brought me here,
Tongues of despair out-clanged the voice of God
In curses on him. Strange how kind men are,—
Everywhere curtesy and kind approach;
The dragon is not known save where he's not, —
Abroad, and in the books; but in his home
Half of the folk has never heard of him.
And yet they have. To find him, that's my quest.
I saw an honest face in the market-place,

A sort of nun or convent waiting-maid,
One whom I thought to ask, and then I lost
her.
But she comes again, —
(*An angel walks across the stage and goes into the church. Wilfred is about to speak to her, but does not.*)
A very decent person — I spoke not
Because she wore some business on her brow
That robed her looks in action. Some good
deed
Shone in her face and rolled before her feet,
As rolls the wave before Aurora's tread,
Purple yet arrowed through with Phœbus' shots,
Thick-falling from the god behind the dawn.
A nun, no doubt, and this a nunnery.
(*He sits a moment in contemplation, then rises slowly, draws his sword, and plants it, hilt up, a little toward the back of the stage. He kneels before the sword on both knees, his hands clasped stiffly before him, his helmet beside him, like a crusader. Enter Thekla and Dio. Thekla is a child of twelve, on crutches; she is dressed in a tattered shawl. Dio is a child of three. They have some roadside flowers.*)

THEKLA

Hold them tighter, Dio, — thus, — both hands.
Dear father Leo wants them for his cell;
The picture wants them, where the candles are,
And all the stony men who stand so still,
To watch us in the chapel. Saints love flowers,

And flowers, though they be weeds, are baby's friends.
No, I say! Hold them so! —What ails the child?
He was so good, he grew so well again,
And seemed so sensible; he grew so wise;
The dandelion, buttercup, and clover
He would pull up and name them like a book;
And yesterday, this sprig of bridal-wreath
He found and brought and wound it in my hair;
But now he wanders, he is lost again
And drops his blossoms! Dio! Baby Dio!

DIO. (*Holding up his hand.*)

Hark!

THEKLA

What, baby?

DIO

Music!

THEKLA

Oh heavens, there is no music! This he doth
Before the fit shall seize him. Dio, Dio,
Thekla will hold him. Come to sister Thekla.

DIO. (*Pushes her away.*)

Hush! Music!

THEKLA

There is no music, darling. (*Weeps.*)

WILFRED. (*Aside.*)

What roadside flowerets, trodden in the dust,
That show like angels in their inner shrine,
And yet so crushed.
(*To Thekla.*) What is it, little miss?
What makes you clutch the child?

THEKLA

His mind is gone.
He was so well; and father Leo says
He surely will get well, but all his fit
Ever comes on him in the thought of music.
His silly brains hear music in the air.

WILFRED

Aye, but there's music. Music! I hear music.
Music there is, sweet maid; be sure of that.

(*Music is now heard for the first time, pianissimo. The knight takes Dio on his knee and sits on the stone bench, or gravestone, next to Thekla.*)

There is more sense in him than in thyself,
Thou trustful little witch. His eye is bright;
But thou hast watched too long beside his cot.
Who are ye both? Stray village sufferers, —

THEKLA

They say we are the children of a king,
But I believe it not, —

WILFRED

King's children beg?

THEKLA

Nay, we beg not: old Leo gives us bread,
Sometimes bright silver bits to buy us shoes,
And we are lodged with Dame Eusebia.

WILFRED

Old Leo is your friend?

THEKLA

Why, without him
We must have starved. But he is very rich
And very good; and we are his dependents,

His children or his kin, I know not which.
We are well cared for: why what can we lack?
If Dio's well, then all the world is well,
And we are happy. Dio, Dio.
(*Kisses the child.*)
Will you grow well again?
(*To Wilfred.*) He was a baby,
So fat and round; and then he grew so thin,
And then his wits went wrong; he could not walk.
Old Leo lays his hands upon our heads,
And prays us well.

WILFRED

The lad is well enough.

THEKLA

Bless God!

(*She kneels towards the church and makes the sign of the cross, instructing the child to do likewise.*)

WILFRED. (*Aside.*)

Lo, we knight-errants run about the world
To find adventures, while the sacred poor
Crouch at our gates at home. Such birds as these
Hop on the village greens of every land,
And chivalry not feeds them. What's a knight?
Is he not one to whom the Saviour's blood,
Unless a gold-encrusted, crystal cup
Inclose it as a relic, seems unclean?
Is he not one who draws his strength to fight
From silken banners in a gallery?
Whom undergoing vanity sustains

To do a prodigy before a king
But wants the nerve alone? A dragon, said I?
Yes, on a Festa, all the world to see
And I the hero! Folly, pettiness!
Yet o'er land and sea
Thousands of leagues have I o'er coursed the earth
To find what was at home.
(*Starts up.*)
But I have found it!
I will adopt these children as my own:
I'll put them in my shield, with the device,
"This is my blood."
(*To Thekla.*) Tell me, thou little woman,
This Leo kind is old.

THEKLA

Oh very old.

WILFRED

And he may die.

THEKLA

Oh no, he will not die.

WILFRED

Come here. Take Dio's hand. He is my child.
I do adopt him. I adopt you both.
Place his hands thus in mine; he is my thrall.
Now yours; I take you too. Now one of each.
Old Leo when he comes shall bless the act,
And call a stronger blessing down from heaven.
It is most comfortable to have children.

(*He sits on the bench, holding the hand of each. The door of the church opens, the music grows louder, and enter Eusebia, Cephas, and one or*

two more citizens; then four bearing a bier on which is the body of Leo.)

THEKLA

O father Leo, father Leo!

(*She throws herself upon the bier, sobbing. When the newcomers perceive Wilfred, the bier is set down.*)

CEPHAS

Sir Knight, I know not if ye meet us here
With ill intent, or as a Christian friend.

WILFRED

Truly, how Christian is not mine to say; but as a friend.

CEPHAS

Be ye of the court?

WILFRED

Not so. A visitor.
Wilfred the Young, a knight from over seas.

CEPHAS

Know ye the children?

WILFRED

They are my thralls: I have adopted them.

(*The mourners whisper.*)

EUSEBIA

(*Who has her arms about Thekla.*)
Know ye their history?

WILFRED

I somewhat know it.
You are Eusebia, as I read your face.

EUSEBIA

Lo, the awaited saint who meets us here
Through the foreknowing providence of God!

Offend him not, good Cephas, he is good:
The children trust him, and I saw a ray
Fall, as from heaven, upon the dead man's face.

(*The angel has followed in at the head of the corpse, but is noticed by no one.*)

WILFRED

Believe me, I'll not harm ye.

CEPHAS

Good Sir Knight,
We must with expedition bury him;
For our permission runs for early dawn,
And charges that the utmost secrecy
Shall cloud the earthing of this good old man.
More I'll dare tell ye when he's in the ground.
Follow our steps. On, comrades, while we may.
Night buries grief. Joy cometh with the day.

(*Exeunt mourners in procession. The angel follows at the head of the bier. Wilfred and the two children bring up the rear. Enter from another quarter Claudias and a Herald. They put up notices on the buildings.*)

CLAUDIAS

Blow and collect the people.

(*Herald blows. Old Simeon, a beggar, comes in.*)

Where are the people? Where is Cephas?
Herald, blow again.

(*Herald blows. More people, and many of them, come in.*)

Herald, read the proclamation!

HERALD

King Draco, by the grace of God, to all his loving people: Out of the great care his Majesty has for the safety and good of his people, it is DECREED that Two Great Walls shall be built from the city to the Dragon's Cave. So that no citizen shall approach the Dragon or go near his cave except by permission of the King.

ALSO, to prevent young knights from being killed by the Dragon, it is DECREED that any knight wishing to fight the Dragon must apply at the King's palace for permission.

Long live King Draco!

THE PEOPLE

Long live King Draco!

SIMEON

Long live the Dragon!

CLAUDIAS

What do you mean, old man?

SIMEON

I say that by this proclamation the King has given the Dragon a nice garden wall to his house. It will save our journey up the hill. We can throw the children into the paddock and let the Dragon eat them in his after-dinner walk.

CLAUDIAS. (*To Herald.*)

Who is that mad-man?

HERALD

It is old Simeon, my lord. He is not in his wits or he should have been banished with the rest long ago.

CLAUDIAS

Proceed with the proclamation. Blow again! (*Herald blows.*) Read the proclamation.

HERALD

A Tournament! King Draco, out of his great love and tender care for his people's happiness, and because there has of late been too much grief in the land, has Proclaimed a Week of Merrymaking, at the close of which a Great Tournament will be held. You are therefore commanded to put off all signs of mourning and repair to your homes, and, dressing yourselves in festival attire, to give yourselves up to Joy and Feasting. Long live King Draco!

SIMEON

I say long live the Dragon. It is now forbidden for any mother to weep. Long live the Dragon.

CLAUDIAS. (*To Herald.*)

Have that man sent to the palace. He is in need of something. Herald, proceed.

HERALD

For one week, beginning Tuesday following, free food and drink will be given to all citizens who repair to the outer booths at the Old Lists. Long live King Draco!

PEOPLE. (*With real enthusiasm.*)

Long live King Draco!

CLAUDIAS. (*To Herald.*)

Now, Herald, to the market! Cephas! Let us find Cephas.

(*Amid the huzzahing and waving of caps Claudias and the Herald exeunt. Enter Wilfred, deep in conversation with Cephas. The other mourners follow in and mingle with the populace. Eusebia keeps Thekla and Dio in her charge.*)

CEPHAS

To save our city's name, we long have tried
To choose the fated children out by lot,
And secretly convey them to the cave.

WILFRED

O miserable men! Your King consents
To have your children eaten?

CEPHAS

He has tried.
(*Appeals to citizens.*)
Has not King Draco done his best to save?
(*There is no answer.*)
Have not young knights gone forth?

SIMEON

And ne'er come back.

FIRST WOMAN

Two of my boys —

SECOND WOMAN

My baby boy of five.

THIRD WOMAN

All, all of mine.

CEPHAS

The King is good, but cannot stop the plague.

SIMEON

The plague takes not the rich.

FIRST WOMAN

The King is safe,
He has no children.

WILFRED. (*Aside.*)

Yet the nobles say there is no dragon.
(*To Cephas.*)
Now they send them up,
Chosen by lot, you say? Who draws the lots?

CEPHAS

The King's own officers, his trusted men.
We have, Sir Knight, a compact with the Dragon,
By computation keeping down his due
To just and certain bounds — four boys a month.

WILFRED

Four boys a month!

CEPHAS

No more, Sir Knight.
'Tis fixed and certain: and his Majesty
Hath staked his honor more shall not be sent,
Nor this appointed number overdrawn,
While stands his kingdom. In King Draco's word
Lies our protection.

WILFRED

Sacred name of God,
Is this protection? An anointed king
Feeds his own subjects to the cruel jaw,
And it is named protection. Stand ye off!
Ye are polluted all of you with crime:
Ye, ye yourselves do give your babes to death.

(*To Cephas.*)

And thou, unreverend man, that tremblest here,
Thou art a pandar.

SIMEON

There spoke the truth.

FIRST WOMAN. (*Kneels.*)

Save us, Sir Knight, we cannot save ourselves.

(*The citizens begin to cluster and kneel about the knight.*)

SECOND WOMAN

(*Whispering hoarsely and vehemently.*)

If any quail, his children go the next,
And if a man speak out against the dragon,
He disappears and leaves no word behind.

THIRD WOMAN

We are betrayed, Sir Knight, and very weak,
We know not how to fight. Thou art a youth
Scarce a day older than my eldest boy,
Who went to fight but as a peasant can,
And died in the deadly cave.

FIRST WOMAN

Oh judge us not,
But help us, holy sir.

WILFRED

So God me help,
As I here dedicate my utmost strength
To save this people.

SECOND WOMAN

Harkee, more's to come.
These proclamations and festivities
Go with new slaughters. It is always so;
The lot fell yesterday; but some delay

Has kept the dragon hungry. For at dawn
I saw two smoky columns in the sky.
At noon he'll breakfast in the market-place
Unless he's fed before.

WILFRED

Nay, that he'll not!
Trust me but with the knowledge of this beast,
And I ere sunset will deliver him
Dead in the market-place, and stuck with flags
To make your burghers cry, "a barbecue."
Ye are enchanted, all of you, I think;
The smell of his foul breath is over ye,
Which with the fumigation of new courage
Will soon be blown away. Your hand, good friends,
For this cause am I come.

(*They cluster about Wilfred and grasp his hand.*)

HERALD. (*Without.*)

Cephas, where is Cephas?

A VOICE

Cephas is called.

(*Enter Claudias and Herald.*)

CLAUDIAS

Cephas, the King, in honor of the feast
Lately proclaimed, makes thee a Minister.
Cephas, the People's Friend, receive this chain.
King Draco loves thee well.

(*Cephas kneels while Claudias places a gold chain about his neck; he then rises. The people have been clustering about Claudias and the Herald and have left the knight alone. Shouts*

of "Cephas, long live Cephas! Cephas, your hand! Bravo!" etc. Cephas is clapped on the back and surrounded.)

CEPHAS

I thank his Majesty, and I thank you all.
I'll serve you all, aye all, the lowliest born,
The peasant, burgher, prince, the Crown itself:
To all the realm I'll be a faithful servant.

SIMEON

And to the Dragon! Don't forget the Dragon!

(*Wilfred, who has been looking on in silence, and with curiosity, now moves across and talks to the beggar in dumb show.*)

CLAUDIAS

The King confers this title on thee, Cephas:
"Executor of the Crown and People's Tribune,
Having the rank of Herald, and the right
To stand in the royal presence."
'Tis thy function to read the lots aloud.

(*The Herald now presents an ugly, crape-covered, oblong box, and holds it while Cephas opens it.*)

SIMEON. (*To Wilfred.*)

This is the ceremony every month.
The names he reads are children that must die.

WILFRED. (*Stepping forward.*)

Stand back! Go tell your King that none shall die;
A knight shall fight the dragon.

CLAUDIAS

Please you, sir,

This kingdom must go on, though knights may
fight.
Until the dragon fall, he must be fed.
'Tis ever so: our customs call for it.
Good stranger Knight, whose case of brilliant
steel
Nobly reports a son of chivalry,
Wait till the tribune speaks.
(*To Cephas.*) Cephas, say on.

WILFRED. (*Interrupting.*)

This man a tribune!

CEPHAS

Good sir, a word! We but fulfil the law.

WILFRED

Thou'lt read the names of children that must die!

CEPHAS

It is the law.

WILFRED

Thou whited sepulchre!

(*Strikes Cephas in the mouth with the back of his hand. Screams of women and confusion.*)

CLAUDIAS. (*To soldiers without.*)

Arrest him!

WILFRED

Thou wilt arrest a knight? Thou paper doll!
Let any man approach within a yard,
And I will kill him.

(*The people and soldiers fall back. Wilfred checks his fury.*)

Why, may God forgive me.
I 'most had slain thee. Nay, what foolish game

Is this ye play, good people, with your straws,
Like children in a barnyard? Should I strike,
My honor were disgraced, and nothing done.
I will not fret you: let the play go on.
It will not hurt. But this I swear to you —
No children more shall die.

CLAUDIAS

A sensible conclusion.
(*Confidentially to Wilfred.*)
A popular and ancient custom here,
And interests strangers.

(*The people cluster about Cephas and the Herald. After some passings of the box, and symbolic formalities, Cephas, with great solemnity, draws and reads.*)

CEPHAS

"Euphorion and old Alcides' son."

FIRST WOMAN

My Zeno's safe, praise God!
Run, run and tell papa our Zeno's safe.
(*Sends off small boy.*)

CEPHAS. (*To Claudias, genially.*)

The lot has taken those we well can spare.

SECOND WOMAN

O Baranbas, I have thee still.

(*Hugging her child. The citizens begin to chatter to each other and to shake hands.*)

A VOICE

Come now, here's peace for a month at least.
Let's to the booth outside the new lists.

SIMEON

Fools, there are more names to be read.
(*To Cephas.*) Read the list, Cephas!

(*The people cluster once more about Cephas and the Herald with intense silent excitement. Cephas tries to read, but dares not.*)

WILFRED. (*Fiercely to Cephas.*)
Read!

CEPHAS

Thekla and Dio.

WILFRED

Liar!

(*As he says this, Wilfred takes a stride forward and raises his sword over Cephas, who drops the paper and falls on his knees. Claudias swings off the cloak from the Herald and casts it over Cephas.*)

CLAUDIAS

Art thou a knight and wilt thou strike a Herald?

WILFRED

He's no Herald!

CLAUDIAS

Aye, he's a Herald; his commission throws
The Herald's sanctity about his acts.
And in the name of chivalry I rear
This holy symbol o'er him.

(*Raises a cross. All kneel.*)

WILFRED

Nay, I'll not kneel to thee. Thou art a devil.

(*Cries of the people, many speaking at once: "He kneels not to the cross." "Away with him!" "He's a spy!" "He is an enemy!"*

"Curse him." "My boy is bewitched that he spoke to last evening." "He hath stolen two children, now he would save them for himself." "He would make himself King," etc. Thekla and Dio run to Wilfred and cling to his legs.)

SIMEON. (*To Wilfred aside.*)

Kneel, you were best, like me: it is no harm.

WILFRED. (*To all.*)

Move not a step, but hear me! He that stirs
(*Gazing about and addressing all.*)
Shall die in his footprints! By my faith in God,
It's not the cross I spurn, but those who raise it;
Nor do I fight a dragon, but a King!
Draco, King Draco, is your enemy;
And in his hideous heart he hates you all
And eats your children. Draco I do fight.
Bear him this challenge, Herald.
(*Flings down his glove at Herald's feet.*)
Now go home —
And in the supplication of the closet
Ask God to give you light.

(*The Herald picks up the gauntlet, and all go out dispersedly and slowly, Claudias giving whispered directions to Cephas. Wilfred is thus left alone with the children. There is a pause.*)

WILFRED

What, have they gone and left us, little maid?
They could not help thee: they being gone away,

Ye are more safe; for they are enemies,
Who hide the devil in a cloak of lies
Till conscience cannot find him. They are gone.
And if our strength be true to swing the sword,
And if our eye be clear to see the helm,
It is because false friends have dropped away,
And we are near to action. Rise, fond heart,
The time is come to play the hero's part.

ACT II

SCENE I — THE ROYAL PALACE

(*The King, Claudias, and other courtiers. The glaive is on the floor.*)

KING

Marvelous! And the knight doth challenge me?
It is as easy kill him as let kill.
Old Leo's prophecies establish us:
My life is charmed, and while the dragon lives
I cannot die. We'll fight the saucy boy!
This Tournament shall show a king in arms.

CLAUDIAS

It is a serious youth, not too well-bred;
But if he fight as nimbly as he talks,
Will keep you dancing. 'Twould have made
you laugh.
The children clung, and Cephas prayed, and
Wilfred Overseas
Made such a ranting and a foam of words
As would have drowned a church.

FIRST COURTIER

And Claudias?

CLAUDIAS

Why Claudias kept his temper and the glaive;
And ducked to dodge the flood.

(*Laughter. A sound as of distant thunder is heard.*)

KING

What sound was that?

SECOND COURTIER

How strangely dark it grows,
As if some ghostly fingers snuffed the sun!

CLAUDIAS

(*Looking out of the window.*)

This darkness runs before our thunderstorms,
And sheds a sheeted pallor o'er the earth.
A gust of summer tempest; — straws and sticks
Flee from the bailiff wind like creditors;
The peasant's wash, uncounted, skyward soars,
Flecking the black, while all his family,
Hens, pigs, and colts, the master and the maid,
Run to the shed, half carried by the blast.
The storm doth make his progress like a god;
Dust in a column rides his axle-tree,
And cataracts of water crash behind.
King Zeus rides by!

(*The storm has been increasing through the speech.*)

KING

Do not jest at it.
Darkness at noontide.

FIRST COURTIER

Aye, it bodes no good.

(*Enter servant in terror.*)

SERVANT

Between the river and the mountain-side,
Skimming the level ocean of ripe wheat,

I saw Queen Dis: above her chariot
She stands a statue, while four plunging steeds,
All ebon black and tusked with ivory,
Plow toward your palace. I, upon the tower,
Have seen and shuddered: therefore, let me go.

CLAUDIAS. (*To another courtier.*)
The man is sick with terror. Give him drink.

(*The servant is helped out.*)

KING
My sister the enchantress! Close the gate!

(*Enter servant, running.*)

SERVANT
Idle, my lord; the porter is struck dead!
A bolt of lightning, that same forked flash.
(*Another flash.*)
The gate is wedged: no power on earth can
budge it.

KING
I will not see her. She is horrible
And comes in horror. Claudias, your hand.

SERVANT. (*Without, announcing.*)
Queen Dis.

(*Enter Queen Dis.*)

KING
Sister, your coming is unheralded.

QUEEN DIS
Save by my flashes, brother. Can you not
Instruct your knaves in hospitality?
Two of them have their lesson. These my
servants
Must in the amber chamber leave this casket,
And then no more annoy you.

(*Enter two servants with a very precious, peculiar-looking box, which they carry across the stage and exeunt.*)

For my steeds,
They pant the fiery path towards Erebus
For safer stabling.

KING

You will stay with us?

QUEEN DIS

An hour, two hours, a week — the Tournament.
When I have access to explain my plans,
I will acquaint you —

(*Claudias and the courtiers take the hint and go off, shrugging.*)

KING

(*Aside to Claudias, shaking his hand.*)
Do not go far.
(*To Queen.*) Sister, you ride in the storm.

QUEEN DIS

Brother, *you* ride in the storm and know it not.
It is to save you I am come at all.
You are in danger, and your kingdom rocks
As in an earthquake. You yourself are sick,
Dizzy, diseased, defenceless, a sure prey
To powers too subtle for your intellect
That cut your life at the root.

KING

Can you not talk in the daylight?

QUEEN DIS

These thick winds
And darkened sky afflict you as they should.
Terror; 'tis terror! I am terrified;

I Dis, queen, goddess, deathless as I am,
Horror doth ride me; and the outward storm
Is but the symbol. One is in the field.
A knight has taken up the children's cause
And we are doomed.

KING

A knight? A paltry boy
That for his challenge shall receive his death.
Give it no thought, my sister.

QUEEN DIS

O thou fool!
That fight'st against a spirit with a sword.
Know then, these children live by others' faith.
Old Leo's thought and prayer kept them alive.
Now, on the very dot of Leo's death,
Arises this young knight who lights his faith
At Leo's dying torch. Now they rebloom
And leap like salmon, strong as antelopes
That snuff the upland breeze in Africa,
Drawing their life from him.

KING

But I will kill this knight.

QUEEN DIS

Too late, too late.
The seed's upon the wind, the voice has echo'd,
The spark has spread; the people catch the flame.

KING

But if he die?

QUEEN DIS

What matter if he die?
Thou foolish one, his body we may kill,
But not his life. But hark!

(*Going very near to the King, to his manifest horror, and speaking vehemently.*)

We must destroy his soul; so dies his power.
That power afflicts thee now, and stroke on stroke
Is falling on my head, and my short arm
Pains night and day in crucial agony.

(*She draws aside her shawl and shows that in the place of her left hand and arm she has the claw of a dragon.*)

The fury of that pain
Shines in the storm, as with my will I move
Whirlwinded through the air.

KING

Horrible woman!

QUEEN DIS

Horrid; because I know
What you would *be* without the knowledge of!
Goddess, enchantress, devil; for I am
But disenchanted from those spells of life
That weave enchantment over everyone,
The filmy web of good-and-evil-mixed.

(*Showing her claw.*)

There is my evil. Yours is everywhere.
You will obey me?

KING

(*After long pause and very reluctantly.*)

Yes.

QUEEN DIS

(*Giving a sigh of relief.*)

Else were we both undone.

Have you three minutes, ere those fops come
back,
To hear my project?

KING

(*Who is sitting down, nods in a disconsolate manner.*)

QUEEN DIS

How shall I say it? Not for many years,
Not since the old King, father of these babes,
Brought me to court here as their governess, —
Not since Cleombrotus —

KING

Don't tell it me.
It is too horrible.

(*King covers his face with his hands; she proceeds.*)

QUEEN DIS

I am in love,
I am in love with Wilfred Overseas,
(*The King shudders convulsively.*)
And he with me —

KING

And he with thee!

QUEEN DIS

Not yet;
But in the dawn my soul did visit him.
Hark, I was crawling with a panther's step
About the children's cottage; and a sword
This way and that way turned to keep me off,
As if invisible walls of light were there,
Guarding the children, and my eye beheld
Wilfred, a burnished angel at his elbow,

That could not fence my eye from piercing his.
(*She approaches the King, speaking rapidly.*)
Let him be wounded at the Tournament.
A drop of blood, a scratch is all I ask;
And to his veins I'll pour the venom in
Shall make him love me. He must not be killed;
Scratched, or disabled merely. Do you hear?

KING. (*Nods*)

It shall be as you say.

QUEEN DIS

Call back your courtiers, brother.

KING. (*Rings.*)

Bid the Lords attend her Majesty.

(*Enter Claudias and the rest.*)

QUEEN DIS

How soon the day
Has changed to sunlight! Lords, I ask your pardon
For my unruly entrance. Women ever
Must have their whims: and that same thunderstorm
Gave me a headache. Claudias,
(*He kneels.*) Nay, your hand —
And now for pleasaunce and all jollity.

ACT II

SCENE II. — WILFRED'S CABIN

(*Wilfred and the children. They are now clean, handsome, nicely dressed. Thekla has no crutch, Dio no sign of mental peculiarity.*)

WILFRED

Now, children, you must not be afraid; for I must leave you for a while and go to the palace. I have challenged this dreadful King and I shall kill him — and then — then

DIO

The Dragon —

WILFRED

The Dragon of course. I shall then have time to go and see if there is any dragon left. You must be good and wait for me.

THEKLA

Oh we'll be good —

WILFRED

And that nice woman is going to take care of you, the nun woman who met us in the graveyard. She will be here, and keep you clean and neat, and drive away all enemies and strangers. (*Enter angel.*) Ah, here she is. Theresa is your name? (*Angel nods.*) Theresa, do you understand the care of children, washing, soaping, drying, putting to bed, feeding,

brushing, watching, scolding, following, punishing, pardoning, tying up, untying, airing, and housing? (*Angel nods.*) These children are good children. I have some business at the King's palace and shall leave them with you. Theresa, Theresa, I'm not sure that nuns understand children. Have you experience? (*Angel nods.*) Where? But were they your own children? That's best. These are my own. Are ye not? As much as any can be. Now, Theresa, I have a thought. You see this horn? It is a Saracen horn brought by my father from Arabia.

And by a witch 'twas tunèd to mine ears
When I was born. (*Sounds the horn.*)
How small a sound it makes.
And yet that sound is native to my soul:
Distance and density are nothing to it.
And were I now in Rome and you in France,
The tiny stream of sound would thread the Alps,
And pierce my eardrums where I lay asleep
With fifty cannons booming over me.
Blow if some danger threats these flaxen heads;
But not for slight occasion.

(*Gives horn to angel.*) Now, young squires,
Help arm your master.

(*They get the armor, and the children help put it on. He talks as they do so.*)

I have killed twelve kings
And several hundred giants. I will strike
Straight for his heart.

(*Enter Simeon, the beggar.*)

SIMEON

Hist, Sir Knight, a word!
I have discovered how to reach the dragon.
A broken wall, a passage underground,
A hole they have forgotten to stop up.
Come, and I'll lead you to him.

WILFRED

Go your ways —
You are the dragon's servant like the rest.
I go to fight the King. When I come back
With half the fame of Europe in my arms —
(*Knocking.*)
Enter! who is there?

(*Enter Herald.*)

HERALD

The King doth send a squire to hold your horse,
And begs you'll deign to use the royal car
Which now with twenty footmen waits for you,
To take you to the palace.

WILFRED

Tell the King
I'll not accept his hospitality.
I come to kill him: let him understand
I seek his palace as an enemy.
Let him defend himself!

(*Herald bows. Wilfred takes his helmet and spear. The angel is standing behind the children on one side of the stage, the Herald on the other. Wilfred in act to depart.*)

(*Curtain.*)

ACT II

SCENE III. THE PALACE

(*The King, Queen Dis in magnificent array, her golden hair in braids, a wreath of roses and a wedding veil. Claudias, courtiers, and ladies.*)

KING

Are all the knights assembled?

CLAUDIAS

At the lists
They wait your Majesty. The gala day
Flaunts to the skies its forest of sharp spears
Which many colored banners interleave.
Almost the people break the barriers down,
So keen their passion to enjoy the sport.

KING

Will not the new knight, think you, show his face
Unvisored to the people and to us,
Ere on the bloody field he launch himself?

CLAUDIAS

A churlish temper, matched with gentlest looks,
Makes him a puzzle. If your Majesties
Can solve the riddle —

QUEEN DIS

Nay, he comes I hope.
Else is our visit barrened of its wonder.

SERVANT. (*Without.*)
Wilfred of Overseas.
(*Enter Wilfred. Stately bows on all sides, which Wilfred returns.*)
WILFRED. (*To King.*)
Although I cannot greet thee as a friend,
King Draco, — for I feel a hostile edge,
And come to meet it with approvèd steel, —
Yet doth this courtesy unman my hate.
Kill thee I will; but thank thee first of all
For a most noble lesson in good manners.
KING
Nay, we ourselves from thee a lesson take
Of what's behind all manners, noble youth.
It makes me proud that you enrich our court
With such example of old chivalry
As keeps the spirit high above the helm
And melts not at soft words. Let sound the trumpet!
Wilfred of Overseas doth challenge us!
(*Trumpet.*)
KING
Sound the acceptance!
(*Trumpet again.*)
CLAUDIAS
Your Majesties, and Wilfred of the Seas,
It must be known to you that kings enthroned
Cannot by foreign knights affronted be,
Except where intervening champions fail.
The knight must fight your Highness' champion
To gain his right to you.

WILFRED

I'll fight them all:
One with another let the knights be sent.
So I have pause to rest, I'll meet them all.
But be it understood, that as the tenth
I meet your Highness.

(*A murmur of approval.*)

QUEEN

Your pardon, gentle youth. Wilt please you take
A favor from a friend? a stranger here,
Yet one whose heart is movèd by your words,
And by your youth, and for you are alone.

(*Offers him a favor.*)

KING

My cousin, Euphronidè, and a princess
Who doth continue great Antenor's line.

(*Wilfred pauses, kneels, and finally takes it with humility.*)

KING

Now to the lists!

(*Music. All go out in majestic procession. The stage is empty for a moment and then re-enter, in great agitation, the Queen, who sits down, puts her elbows on her knees, and runs her fingers through her hair.*)

QUEEN

How they wait, — how they wait, —
No sound forever — it must be some false start!
No sound —

(*Sound of a bugle.*)

They rush! They meet!

(*Faint sound of a cheer.*)

Which way? which way? —

(*Starts up.*)

But I must wait —

If they can but wound him — *wound* him, not kill —

(*Enter a servant, running. The Queen rises and accosts him roughly.*)

QUEEN

Which is it?

SERVANT

(*Amazed at finding her there.*)

A surgeon! a surgeon!

Huon de Paganis has his death. He cannot move!

(*Exit servant.*)

QUEEN

Thank God! Not killed, at least!

Can ye not wound him? A whole pack of wolves

Not wound a sheep dog!

Ah, this waiting —

(*Bugle sounds faintly, again faint shout.*)

SERVANT. (*Returning.*)

It is no use.

He'll die before the surgeon can be got!

QUEEN. (*Roughly to servant.*)

Fetch me the news! The sight of blood destroys me.

(*Follows him across the stage.*)

Fetch me the news!

(*Exit servant. The trumpet is now sounding almost continually and the shouting accompanies it in bursts. Re-enter servant. Queen almost throttles him.*)

QUEEN

Well —?

SERVANT

He does destroy them all as fast as dolls, —
Rupert and Hilbrand, Gensor, Callias,
The giant-limbed Orestes, all are slain.
And Wilfred not yet breathed —

VOICE. (*Outside.*)

Hark, a cry!

(*Great shout.*)

Wilfred is down! He's wounded!

QUEEN. (*To servant.*)

Let them fetch him here, —
I am a leech. But keep all surgeons out!
Let the King know I cure him.
(*Aside.*) If he be killed!
(*To servant.*) Is he dead? Oh is he dead?

(*She breaks away as four enter bearing Wilfred unconscious. The favor is on his shoulder. They set him down.*)

QUEEN

(*Exeunt servants*)

So, leave him —
Not dead, and hardly wounded, — only weak —
Stunned and exhausted.

(*She sits down by him.*)

(*Very softly.*) Wilfred —

(*Long pause, and again*)

Wilfred —

(*Soft music.*)

Wilfred, I'll whisper here;
Ah, may I not come near?
I'll not disturb thy slumbers, Wilfred dear.

Wilfred of Overseas, a girl does wait
Where summer roses peep o'er garden gate,
She that, when thou wast young,
Thy boyish head with heavy garlands hung,
And paused to watch thee, where, wild fields among,
Thou'd'st meditate.

Wilfred, ah Wilfred, look,
Where leans the willow o'er the talking brook;
See if one stands within yon shady nook,
Who knows thy name;
Follows and fosters, loves and dotes upon thee;
Turn, gentle youth, a goddess' eyes are on thee.
Turn, ere some mortal maiden have undone thee
To lasting shame.

Love me, my Wilfred, I am only thine,
That know thy heart and with it intertwine
The rich-encumbered clustering grapes from mine. My Wilfred dear,
Love me, and we together will unwind
The spool of life, till at its end we find
The thoughts that caged us here:
The thoughts that caged us and the ties that bind
Are always near.

Love is the quest that o'er thy deep endeavor
Followed and floated upward and forever —
Love was thy quest.
The fortress with its banner in the sky,
Fame, Honor, Fortune, Duty, Destiny —
The Great Adventure, — pile it ne'er so high, —
Love, love is best.

'Tis but the saying of what all do know,
To say you love me, Love saith always so;
All else is lies.
And he is damned for telling of untruth,
Who in the earnest lustihood of youth
His love denies.

I am thy princess,
Thou art my delight,
My noble hero and my goodly knight.
Open thine eyes, she bends above thee —
My dear, my only friend.
This is my life's beginning and its end —
Wilfred, I love thee.

(*Wilfred moves, she recedes a step gently.*)

QUEEN

What is it?

WILFRED. (*Sitting up.*)

Where am I? Such a rush of foaming water
And such a sound of bees. A spinning-wheel
Runs in my head and turns a lullaby,
Tunably sweet. (*Sees her.*) The lady of the loom,
Circe, for fair as Circe you do seem,

And your long locks of braided, flaxen hair
Yellow as autumn, thick as standing wheat,
And framing all the treasures of the earth, —
Pomona surely!

QUEEN

Nay, a princess only.

WILFRED

Where have I known thee?

QUEEN

All these many years.
In your heart's chancel, Wilfred, where those hymns
Rise from the pavement towards the roofing stars.

WILFRED

Have I destroyed the dragon?

QUEEN

Ay, you have.
People and King proclaim you. Now, they wait
Till, with the restoration of your health,
Mine and thy nuptials shall proclaimèd be.

WILFRED

Why, I am well. Go spread the news abroad.
Let them come in, the nobles, rabble, all.
I will announce it: call the Pontifex.

QUEEN

All is prepared, Sir Knight. The King's at hand,
And all the priestly officers.

(*Enter procession, headed by the Pontifex, as to a wedding. The Pontifex takes his stand before the couple. King and courtiers follow and range themselves.*)

PONTIFEX

Euphronidè, daughter of Antenor's line —

QUEEN

Here.

PONTIFEX

Wilfred of Overseas, the Dragon Slayer —

WILFRED

Here.

PONTIFEX

Is it your firm intention to be wed?
Kneel and declare.

(*The Pontifex is holding up his cross. The Queen kneels.*)

KING

Kneel, kneel, Sir Knight.

PONTIFEX

Kneel and proceed, my son.

WILFRED

What is that cross? Why kneel ye? Who does kneel?
There is some implication in the act
That waves me off.

(*Sound of the magic trumpet. He stares about.*)

What's that?

CLAUDIAS

Sure, he is mad.
This recent loss of blood has made him mad.

KING

Proceed without the kneeling.

PONTIFEX

Is it your firm intention to be wed?

WILFRED

(*Gazing abstractedly about. Sound of the trumpet.*)

Where are the children?
Where are my children?
What was done with them?
Give me my children, traitors, murderers, —
You've mewed them up! Ye've killed them!
Give them back!

(*He turns from one to another, storming, and they give way before him.*)

Where are the children that ye robbed me of?

KING

Madness is on him. Ye had best beware, —
The eye he rolls sees nothing but in thought.

A COURTIER

He hath the strength of madness in his arm.

WILFRED

What is this painted pack of picture cards
That wheels about me? Silent and intent,
Ye stand a-staring. This was once a King,
Whose color, like his crown, doth come and go.
This, an old image of a Pontifex,
Carried in slow procession at some feast.
A Courtier next, a perfumed mountebank.

(*To Queen Dis.*)

A skeleton that wears a rosy wreath.

(*He extends his arm and with great deliberation removes the wreath. The veil and flaxen hair come with it. He drops them, and as he does so Queen Dis falls at full length. Her dragon arm is exposed.*)

Still in a dream ye stand and question me.
How came I to this madhouse? Empty shells
Without a heart amongst ye! Let me go!
My children clutch me, I must go to find them.

(*He stumbles, totters, and clanks to the door, nobody daring to stop him, and so exit.*)

CLAUDIAS

The fight hath dazed him. Quick attend the Queen!

(*Curtain*)

ACT III

SCENE I.—WILFRED'S CABIN

(*Night. A low table, on which are a plate of bread, jug of milk, etc. Also the magic horn. A single lighted candle. Thekla has fallen asleep in her chair over a picture book. Dio is asleep on a pallet by her side. Enter Wilfred, battle-worn. He sets down his helmet, shield, and sword. As he comes in he looks toward the children.*)

WILFRED

They at least are safe; my brain is ebbed
And does not float the mind:
It rubs and touches bottom. I have had
Shocks that unsettle reason, and I miss
That certainty towards truth that once I knew.
All is miasma and a slippery ground:
I climb an icy mountain and slide back.
Am I one inch the nearer to my goal?
And yet the back and mainspring of my life
Is broken. Such another day
And Wilfred passes.

(*Looks toward the children.*)

They at least are safe.

(*With sudden emotion.*)

O for the peace that shines about their heads!
Why not for me? Why not such peace for me?

Who see it even in a famished glance,
As in the desert dying travelers
See water in their dreams. O children dear,
Ye are sent to tempt me; for I must go forth
To find the dragon. Where? I do not know.
It troubles me I am no longer fit,
My limbs are twisted, and my heart is hurt.
But this is nothing; I, at least, can die.
And in the cataract of human woe,
What is one life? The offer is the need.
If this be it, I make it willingly.

(*He looks up and perceives the Angel, who has entered and is standing over the children. To the Angel, but in a dazed manner.*)

Art thou Theresa, or an angel bright?

ANGEL

Both, Wilfred.

WILFRED

How came ye hither?

ANGEL

I am always here,
Sometimes unseen and sometimes visible.

WILFRED

Yet always here. Who art thou, Angel bright?

ANGEL

I am the radiance and the fringe of truth.

WILFRED

Give me, good Angel, power to see thee oft.

ANGEL

The power to see me is a part of me.

WILFRED

Angel, I am of late grown strangely weak.

ANGEL

Nay, you are stronger, Wilfred, than before.

WILFRED

All of my quest was just a kind of dream.

ANGEL

Wilfred, such dreams as yours are only seen
When some new age is born. They rise in you
Out of the flooded sorrows of the world,
Showing a track of light from heart to heart,
A beaten golden path. This kind of dream
Begins to glow across King Draco's land,
And, passing through thee, humbles all thy heart,
Which thou thinkst weakness. All thy quest was here,
And thou art nothing but a prophecy,
The substance of new light.

WILFRED

And shall the dragon
Die by that light?

ANGEL

He doth. Thy sword shall break.
But in thy hand a sword of heavenly make,
Tipped with seraphic fire, shall turn itself
Against the monster. Rest, good Wilfred, rest.
(*As she says this she makes a pass with a spear. He closes his eyes and the Angel exit.*)

WILFRED. (*Waking.*)

I thought an angel offered me a spear,
Saying the time had come. I must have slept.

Surely some heaven-appointed minister
Has late been with me, or do these infuse
The sudden restoration in my soul?
(*Approaches the children.*)

THEKLA. (*Waking and seeing him.*)
Wilfred!
(*She runs to him.*)

WILFRED
Hush, do not wake him.

THEKLA
Where have you been, dear Wilfred?

WILFRED
In the world,
Fighting and thinking, —

THEKLA
Oh we thought of you.
Theresa teaches us to pray for you.
And once she blew the bugle.

WILFRED
When was that?

THEKLA
She told us you would come. O Dio, Dio,
Wilfred is come! This is no time to sleep.
(*She wakes up Dio, and the children sit on Wilfred's knees.*)

DIO
We are your thralls.

THEKLA. (*To Wilfred.*)
That's what Theresa says.

WILFRED
Where is Theresa?

THEKLA

Here, why here, she was.
She told us you were coming, and just then
I fell asleep. But, Wilfred, were you ill?

WILFRED

Whatever be her goings and her comings,
She keeps my children well.

THEKLA

She has a spear
As bright as starlight, and she holds it up.
That's all she does. But, Wilfred, supper's ready.
Theresa brought us food and bade us wait
Till you should come. Wilfred, you must sit here.

(*They sit and eat.*)

WILFRED

This is a glorious feast.

DIO

We are your thralls.

(*A knock at the door.*)

WILFRED

Who's there? Come in!

(*Enter old Simeon.*)

SIMEON

Sir Knight, Sir Knight!

WILFRED

Old Simeon, come in.
(*To children.*) This is a happy party, isn't it?
Wilfred's home-coming, Wilfred's sweet return
To his small nest and tuneful, —

THEKLA

Tuneful what?

WILFRED

Humming-birds!

(*The children laugh. Wilfred points to the children's feast.*)

Pray you, partake with us.

(*Makes a place for Simeon.*)

SIMEON

Sir Knight, there is no time for humming-birds.
The Dragon's on the watch. His day draws near.
Again the lots are shaken in the urn.
King Draco calls for more.

WILFRED

(*In the act of drinking, puts down the cup.*)

Of course, old Simeon,
The fighting must go on, and we must do it.

SIMEON

Hist! Ye will not trust me: I can tell you
A way to reach the Dragon. But you're sick —

WILFRED

No. Not a bit. Go on.

SIMEON

A broken wall, —
I've tried the place a thousand times alone, —
And I'll go with ye, underneath the ground
And up again; and while ye tackle him
I'll summon all the burghers to the wall
To pull it down.

WILFRED

Your burghers will not come;
But, Simeon, I will. These lambs are safe,
Nothing shall harm them. I am sure of that.

And out of all my comforts this is most —
That they are safe.
(*To the children.*) Bid me goodbye,
As gladly as I bid ye wait for me.

THEKLA AND DIO. (*With enthusiasm.*)
Goodbye!
Goodbye, dear Wilfred! goodbye, goodbye, etc.

SIMEON
We must be gone, Sir Knight. The night wears on.

WILFRED
Coming, old Simeon? Thekla, you must pray.
Kneel thus awhile, say nothing, only think.
For while we think at home our thoughts go forth
And help the fighters.

(*As he says these last lines he causes both children to kneel close together at the front of the stage quite near to one side. Their hands are clasped before them. They are to remain thus throughout the following scene. Wilfred and the beggar now go out. Total darkness, except that a shimmer of light shows the kneeling figures of the children. The scene now changes to the outside of the Dragon's cave.*)

SIMEON.
(*Without, and in the darkness, hoarsely.*)
Stoop low, Sir Knight, the bricks come tumbling down:
The least disturbance sends them. Mind the bones

And skull things that will trip ye. Now we're free.
From this on is an even straggly path
(*Enter Simeon and Wilfred.*)
Straight to the cavern. Enter not, Sir Knight,
But call him out. Your sword is durable,
And cuts through steel. I saw the Tournament.
Ye'll not be long to kill him! Fare ye well.
I'll run and warn the people. Fare ye well.

WILFRED

Fare well, old Simeon.
This is the only man who speaks the truth;
The rest are murderers.
(*The light has slowly increased. He looks about.*)
Ye rocky walls,
That sepulcher so many hundred dead,
How have I dreamed of ye! This sullen hour
Before the tingling sun hath touched the crag
Might chill the heart of manhood. Ah, the boys,
Joyous, rash boys, who from this echoing cave
Sent forth such martial music to the world!
Comrades, I claim you: brothers, I am here.
Ye could not wait for me, but sent your voice,
And I am come to carry on your war.
Dragon, come forth!
Another knight doth call: come forth, I say!
Sleepest thou, Dragon? Forth! Come forth, I say!
Wilfred of Overseas is at the cave!

(*A clanking is heard, and enter the Dragon.*)

WILFRED

Die, Monster!

(*He assails the Dragon. The fighting must be symbolical on both sides, a blow and a ward, the changing of positions, a stroke and return stroke, heavy breathing, silence, and many desperate throes. At last Wilfred misses his stroke, which is so violent that he falls on both knees. The Dragon places a paw on the top of Wilfred's shield. They move across the stage and back in struggle. Wilfred cannot free the shield. By a gigantic effort Wilfred gets into a position of slight advantage and deals a terrific downward blow on the Dragon's helm. The sword breaks. Wilfred falls backward and is caught upon a low rock. The Dragon, still gripping the top of the shield, places a paw upon the prostrate and helpless Wilfred and peers down over the shield into his face.*)

WILFRED

I hate thee still!

DRAGON

Wilfred, forgive me!

WILFRED

Had I the power to smite, I would destroy thee. I can but *will* thy death.

(*He reaches backward by a gesture as if to avoid the Dragon and a spear is put into his hand by the Angel, who enters only in time to do this. Wilfred takes the spear and very deliberately*

touches the crest of the Dragon with it. The Dragon slowly rears, as if in mortal agony, claws the air, totters and falls at full length with a prolonged groan. The dragon's helmet comes off and rolls on the ground, while the long black hair and blue asphodels of the goddess stream out upon the stage. After one or two heaves of death, the Dragon collapses and is still.)

WILFRED. (*Full of awe.*)

Not I have done this, but some power behind.
What is this spear that turns within my hand,
And once again points cave-wards? Are ye there,
Spirits of evil? Once again, come forth!
Ye are reduplicated into beasts,
That roam and kill and feed upon mankind,
And some new monster comes.

(*Enter from the cave King Draco.*)

Thou thought'st to save thyself by shielding her.
King Draco! It is well thou comest now;
For I could find and kill thee, wert thou hid
Under the ocean, or beyond the moon.
Perish, base King!

(*Touches Draco with the spear and the King slowly sinks without a word and dies beside the Dragon.*)

There lie ye both. Alas! ye are not dead,
But fled to new disguises.

(*He now turns and sees the Angel standing in the back center on a slight eminence, and*

shielding the two children, who have taken their places by the Angel during Wilfred's speech to Draco. The people have flocked in during the same period. They are led by old Simeon and are dressed in medieval holiday costume. Wilfred is lost in wonder for a moment, giving the populace a chance to fall into the tableau.)

WILFRED

Angel, thy spear hath killed thine enemies,
And saved the children of a rightful King.
(*To the people.*)
Kneel to true princes, burghers; ye had all —
Forget it not — consented to the sin.
Nor were ye less confederate than these —
(*Pointing to the dead.*)
Who with their deaths have paid their infamy.
All were participant; and if the spear
Which touches some to life and some to death
Have touched the nation, may its inward fire,
Which saveth now these children, save us too.
We are responsible: by us they died,
And in our life they live.
(*To Angel.*) Take back thy spear,
But hold it over us.
(*Angel receives the spear.*)

CHRISTMAS ONCE MORE

A SACRED CANTATA FOR CHILDREN

CHRISTMAS ONCE MORE

PART I; OR PRELUDE. *The childhood of a Saint: a drama in one act without music*

PART II, CANTATA. *The Vision of Mary; a Morality with music and singing*

SCENE. *Cologne on the Rhine in about the year* 400 A.D.

CHARACTERS OF THE PRELUDE

FATHER ANTONIUS, *a holy man*
FULVIA, *his ward, aged ten*
ELSA, *a friend to Fulvia, aged about ten*
SIGURD, *father to Elsa, a German farrier*
Both Elsa and her father are pagans

CHARACTERS OF THE CANTATA

AN ANGEL
THE THREE SHEPHERDS
THE THREE KINGS
UNSEEN CHORUS OF ANGELS
THE CONGREGATION

SCENE OF THE CANTATA

THE STABLE AT BETHLEHEM

CHRISTMAS ONCE MORE

PART I

THE CELL OF ANTONIUS

FULVIA

Father Antonius, with Christmas near
We need to save our scraps. The poor are fed
All the year round on bits of Christmas cheer.

ANTONIUS

Where do you learn such wisdom, Fulvia?
For in my rustic study you have sat —
Nor ever known an abler schoolmaster —
Since your first father died. Yet every day
Shows gleams of scattered light and sparks of fire
That came not from my lamp.

FULVIA

'Tis from the Fathers. When you are not here
I read these volumes. (*Pointing to folios.*)

ANTONIUS. (*Aside.*)

O power of Heavenly Grace
That shines direct upon this little maid!

FULVIA

Tell me what Christmas music we shall have.
Is it a play, or acted parable?

ANTONIUS

It is a history of Jesus' life,
Told in a set of pictures and of tunes
Such as rude piety can understand.

FULVIA

Oh, may I see it?

ANTONIUS

Nay, I cannot say;
'Tis not for children.

FULVIA

But I have a friend,
A pagan, unbaptized, impenitent,
And cold to Christ, a child for whom he died,
Who may, through such a play, be brought to him.
Father Antonius, 'tis not for me!
I need no plays nor music; I have you.
But Elsa, who in seeing might be saved,
Elsa, my friend, — if you could find a place,
A nook to hide her at the sacred play,
From it she might draw Christ. Keep me away,
But find a place for her.

ANTONIUS

For both, for both!
Though I be scolded for't, I'll hide you both.
Was it not Christ who said, Forbid them not?
But we are ever bettering Christ's words
With meanings which refute them.

FULVIA

'Is not Christ
Among the heathen, he being everywhere?

ANTONIUS

Deep are thy reasonings, thou saintly child:
For children's angels are so near to God
That they themselves exact him everywhere.
They drain theology without a qualm,
Drink reason to the dregs and ask for more,
Splitting the darkest mysteries of faith
With easy question. Fulvia, my child,
Thou reasonest well. If Christ be everywhere,
He lives as certain in the heathen breast
As in the elect. The Church but draws him out,
Finds and proclaims him — first by baptism,
A rite through Christ's example sanctified —

FULVIA

Who is the Church?

ANTONIUS

Too fast, my Fulvia!
Can I not answer one thing at a time?
But I must sweat and wheeze to satisfy
Your over-nimble wit? My Fulvia,
Have I not sworn to teach you all I know,
And did I not on your first father's death
Adopt you as my heir? My holiest vow
Makes all my wisdom thine. But give me breath
At least for prayer, which draws the meaning down
On all our questions. Fulvia, my child,
Leave me a while: I promise to declare
All that I understand, another time.

FULVIA

Nay, Father Antony: an easy thing
I wish to know, and you must tell me now.

ANTONIUS. (*Aside.*)

Alas! My home-drawn wisdom is inapt
To feed an infant saint: and but that God
Compels me by my vow to be her nurse, —
Having revealed by many potent signs
That in this child he hides a minister
And flaming witness to his holy Church, —
I should remand her to her peasant home,
Relieved to lose her.
(*To Fulvia.*) Fulvia, my pet,
I will content you. But be patient with me.
I am not, as you think, a learnèd man,
And many points are doubtful at the best,
And deeper theologians than myself
Have stumbled in them. Only my poor thoughts
Are good enough for me to wall my cell
With pictures of God's heaven and thoughts of him.

FULVIA

You are my dearest father, friend and angel.

ANTONIUS

Remember, I but tell you what I think;
You must seek further.

FULVIA

Good.

ANTONIUS. (*With apprehension.*)

But wait a bit!
It's not the mystery of the Trinity?

FULVIA

No.

ANTONIUS

Nor the necessity for Adam's fall?

FULVIA

No, Father Antony.

ANTONIUS

The meaning of "proceedeth" in the creed?

FULVIA

No, nothing of the sort. I wish to know
If one who is not priest or holy man,
Or monk, or something sacred in the church,
May yet baptize an infant. For, you say,
If baptism, which is a sacrament,
May not in cases of extremity —
In cases of extremity — you said —

ANTONIUS

Correct. In cases of extremity —
Ah, I remember. Yes of course he may.
Any good Christian may baptize a child.
And in the early days the same applied
To those, being penitent, of riper years.
For as the Church in all her members lives,
So each of us, for several purposes,
Is the whole Church.

FULVIA

Thanks, dear and good papa.
That's all I want to know.
(*Kisses him and exit into the house.*)

ANTONIUS

'Tis strange, the young

Must ever break their teeth against abstractions;
While we, whose teeth are gone, live but by faith.
This youngster has the theory of the Church
As pat as Paul.

(*Knocking without.*)

What's that? Whoe'er ye be,
There's nothing here to warrant violence.

(*More knocking.*)

Lift, lift the latch, ye madman. Wait a bit;
You've locked it with your haste.

(*Opens the door. Enter Sigurd.*)

SIGURD

Give me my daughter! Give me back my child,
You wicked sorcerer! You have her here,
And with your spells have changed her to a beast.

(*Antonius holds up a crucifix. Sigurd falls back and cringes.*)

Mercy, mercy! It is on me now,
Horrible weakness and the sweat of death.
I feel it coming! The dark Weirds of Eld
Wave at me through his eyes. Have mercy, Father!
Take all this gold, but give my baby back.

(*Produces gold bracelets and jewelry, which he puts on the ground.*)

ANTONIUS

(*Puts down the crucifix.*)

There is no child, except my Fulvia,
That lives within this cell. Thou foolish man,
Put up thy gold: I have not hid thy child.

SIGURD

Her very footprints have I followed here,
And every German finger pointed here.

ANTONIUS

Wait, you shall see yourself.
Fulvia! my little girl! (*Calls.*)

(*Enter Fulvia.*)

Is this the child? My Fulvia, this man
Has lost his little girl —

(*Fulvia holds up the tiny crucifix that hangs at her girdle, and Sigurd falls to the ground and wallows.*)

SIGURD

Turn it away from me! Oh you are kind,
Old man. The white witch bites the worst.
Turn off the stream!

FULVIA

Who is this wolfish man, good god-papa?

ANTONIUS. (*To Sigurd.*)

Is this your child, fond madman? Is it she?

SIGURD

I cannot tell: my eyes are blind with light.

ANTONIUS. (*To Fulvia.*)

Put down the cross and offer him your hand.

(*As Fulvia offers her hand Sigurd shrinks and retreats, examining her intently.*)

SIGURD

I think that it is she, but in a trance.

(*Aside.*)

If I could touch her with my mother's salve
I'd turn her back into herself again.

(*He puts something on his hand from a box. He now holds out his hand, and Fulvia shrinks and retires before him, still holding out her hand. Finally, as he touches her, she screams "Jesu, Jesu," holds up the crucifix, and falls to the ground in a swoon.*)

ANTONIUS

Keep off, devils! Off, I say.
(*Strikes Sigurd. To Fulvia.*)
My child, my child, what ails thee?
(*To Sigurd.*) Pagan dog,
What hast thou done to her?
(*To Fulvia.*) My pretty child,
Speak to Antonius, speak to old papa.

FULVIA. (*Half conscious.*)

I see a crown, Antonius! (*Waking.*)
O Father Antony!
I saw a crown.

ANTONIUS

It was, — it is, — the crown of martyrdom
Predicted at your birth, my Fulvia;
And which from time to time above your head
Glows visibly. It is not to be feared.

FULVIA

Where is the savage man?

ANTONIUS. (*To Sigurd.*)

Get up, you dog!
Your brutish superstition has prevailed
To frighten a sweet child.

SIGURD (*Aside.*)

She said a wolf.
I'm changing to a wolf; my nails are claws

And fur is on my head. I can't get up!
I can't get up!

(*Snarls like a wolf and cries, "I can't get up, I can't get up."*)

ANTONIUS. (*Kicking him.*)

Get up, you pagan brute, and lick the feet
That seraphs shall adore in Paradise.

FULVIA

Father, a word. Leave me alone with him.
Believe me, I am guarded. Go away:
I can restore him both to life and hope,
And get him back the child.

ANTONIUS

What if the fiend in him should bark at grace?

FULVIA

(*Pointing to the door.*)

A coward, Father? Have I not my cross?

(*Exit Antonius.*)

(*Arranges her hair and then to Sigurd.*)

Stand up!

(*He does so, trembling in every limb.*)

So you are Elsa's father! Do you love her,
And follow her, and love and follow her
Across the world?

(*Sigurd makes a gesture of assent.*)

You pagans love your children?

(*Sigurd, as before.*)

Sigurd the farrier, my Elsa's father, —

(*She suddenly perceives the gold.*)

What is all this gold?

SIGURD

Ransom.

FULVIA

Ransom? From Christ you cannot ransom her.

SIGURD

It is the tribal wealth of all my house.

FULVIA

Take it again: no gold can ransom her.
Take it again, good Sigurd, souls by souls
Alone are ransomed; you must bring your soul,
Aye and the souls of all your family,
Ere God will take a ransom for your child.

SIGURD

How can I catch the souls to bring them here?

FULVIA

O Sigurd! Come yourself and they will follow.

SIGURD

How do I know your power to find the child?

FULVIA

(*Pushes door open, and in an inner chamber shows Elsa asleep on a couch.*)
Hush, do not wake her, or we all lose all.
She is half lost to you, half found to us,
And both of us may lose her if she wake.
Hush, she is dreaming of her newer life
And sees her father's house across a gulf,
Stretching her arms to draw you after her.
Hush, or we wake her.
(*Closes the door.*)
You must cross the gulf.

SIGURD

Elsa, my Elsa!

(*He would leap forward, but she holds up the cross and he gives way.*)

I must cross a gulf?

FULVIA

To-morrow is our feast and holiday,
Christmas, the Christian Christmas. On that day
We hold a service in the open air,
Making a theater of pine-tree boughs,
And act or sing some pages from his life
By whom we live. O Sigurd, on that day,
A child led all mankind across a gulf;
And all our souls went flocking after him.
Yours, and your Elsa's and your family's,
They beckon you to come. Upon that day
The troubled shadows flee before his light
And leave the heavenly legions visible;
And you, who saw your Elsa's sleeping shadow,
Shall see her shining soul upon that day.

SIGURD

What shall I do?

FULVIA

Do nothing, only wait.
Not what we do, but what is done to us
Makes Christians of us.

SIGURD

Is my Elsa safe?

FULVIA

As safe as any lamb within the fold.
Sigurd, to-morrow morning seek this cell
Before the east is flecked with cloudy light,
And wait Antonius' greeting. You will find

A busy, glad, united company,
Bustling to service. Fear us not, good man,
Your friends have friends among us. Will you
come?

SIGURD

Truly, sweet princess.

FULVIA

Witch, you said.

SIGURD

Oh pardon.
Truly, most noble princess, I will come.
(*Kisses her hand and exit.*)

FULVIA

This is no wolf,
But a good sheep dog, something shaggy yet,
But kind within; and being disciplined
Will leap and bark about the flock of God,
Or lead them like a deacon to the field,
Play father to the white and woolly lambs
Born in the faith, and teach them seriously,
As if he were an ancestor of Christ.
God made these Germans fitter to receive
Than we of Rome to give the sacraments.
(*Calls.*) Elsa! My Elsa!

(*Enter Elsa.*)

ELSA

I dreamed I heard my father calling me.

FULVIA

Perhaps he did.

ELSA

But you will keep him out, you will save me
and snatch me from the burning? You said

you would. Will you baptize me now, Fulvia? Oh, I want to feel the magic water changing me all inside, and making me into a bird. Papa told me that my aunt was changed into a kingfisher by an old Christian witch who lives on nothing but acorns and washes herself with sand. When I'm changed, I'll go to visit her and every Sunday I'll bring you news of the spirits.

FULVIA. (*Holds up the cross.*)
Elsa! Silence!

ELSA
(*Instead of being afraid of the cross, examines it with rapture.*)
Shall I have one like this?

FULVIA
Benighted child, until thou do repent
Thou canst not be baptized. A baby may,
Because a baby — But thou art a person of riper years.

ELSA. (*Bursts into tears.*)
Wow, wow, wow! You Christians cheat! I'll never play with you again. My father told me not to play with you. Let me go home! Let me go home! They all told me you were bad. You nasty old thing.

FULVIA
Elsa, dear Elsa, listen.

ELSA
Yes, you cheat.

FULVIA
Listen, the Hermit Antony, —

ELSA

Yes, you cheat.

FULVIA

It all is in these words, "being penitent,"

ELSA. (*Snuffling.*)

Yes, — well, —

FULVIA

Being penitent, — you then may be baptized.

ELSA

Fulvia, is that all? I'm penitent.
See if I'm not. Come feel me, Fulvia.
I'm penitent all over. Old papa
Antonius will surely let me in —

(*The sound of singing or of a few solemn chords is heard.*)

What's that?

FULVIA

It is the Angel Chorus practising
For Christmas service. Elsa, you are coming;
And, Sigurd, your papa is coming too.

PART II

THE CANTATA

(The scene which is to follow represents the play as given in Cologne in A.D. 400, not only as to the stage, but as to the audience.

The audience in the theater or hall now represents the assembly of early Christians who witness the play. As the cantata is not merely a play, but is, in a sense, a service, the audience will from time to time sing hymns, which form a part of the cantata. The first two or three rows of audience are made up of ten or twenty children, in the costume of the fourth century. These children file in before the curtain goes up and fill the seats, which have been vacant during Part I. Among them are seen all the characters in Part I. They lead in the singing of such hymns as are herein marked "By the Congregation." The general audience is expected to sing also. The words of the hymns are found on printed leaflets to be distributed. The curtain rises and discloses the scene, before the Stable at Bethlehem.

The stage is decorated with pines and evergreens. There should be no attempt at scenery nor any change of scene except as indicated below. On the left side of the

stage, about halfway back, is a wooden framework, to indicate, rather than represent, the stable. Within it sits Mary holding the infant Jesus in her arms. The group must be as little as possible obscured by the frame. Either within the stable behind Mary, or on the roof, there is a stand for the Angel, who soon appears. The Angel is supposed to be standing on the roof, and is unseen by Mary. Mary remains throughout the cantata in an almost unconscious state of contemplation. The three shepherds are asleep on the ground.)

INSTRUMENTAL PRELUDE

BY THE CONGREGATION

Jesu, Jesu in the skies,
Now thy sacred play begin;
Through the windows of our eyes
Shine upon our hearts within.

Since thy days upon the earth,
Ah, how many years have flown:
All are dead who saw thy birth,
All to whom thy face was known.

Yet thy birthday do we keep,
Trusting thou wilt soon appear;
Ah, delay not, for the sheep
Long to have the shepherd near.

Jesu, Jesu in the skies,
Now thy sacred play begin;
Through the windows of our eyes
Shine upon our hearts within.

(*The three shepherds rise, look about, and then sing.*)

THE SHEPHERDS

We were seated on the ground,
Half asleep, when we awoke.
All at once it shined around,
From the clouds the glory broke.

And the angel voices sang
Sweeter than the Psalmist's songs;
Gloriously their voices rang,
"Glory, God, to thee belongs."

Hark! again their voices ring!
Hark! again I hear them sing!

CHORUS OF ANGELS. (*Unseen.*)

Glory, Glory, Glory
Be to God on high;
And to earth again
Peace and good-will to men.
Amen, amen.

THE SHEPHERDS

Faded are the voices clear;
We are sunk once more in night,
Unless an angel shall appear
And lead us by his light.

ANGEL

(*An angel has appeared on the roof of the stable. The angel does not sing, but speaks, being accompanied by instrumental music, except as otherwise noted.*)

Fear not: for behold, I bring you good

tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

By the Congregation

Haste ye shepherds of the plain,
Haste to where your Lord is lain.
In a manger ye shall find him,
And in swaddling clothes they bind him.
Haste, good shepherds, haste again.

Chorus of Angels. (*Unseen.*)

Glory, Glory, Glory
Be to God on high;
And on earth again
Peace and good-will to men.
Amen, amen.

(*Enter the three kings bearing their gifts.*)

Angel

Wise men, wise men, marvel not:
Here your star has come to rest.
Seek within this humble cot
For the Saviour of the West.

By the Congregation

Haste, good kings, to tell your story,
Kneeling down before the glory.
Gaspar, Melchior, Balthazar,
Open each your golden treasure
Lest the shepherds run before ye.

The Three Kings

Be thou angel, be thou star,
Flaming beacon of the sky,

We do follow from afar;
Where thou leadest we must hie.

We beheld the starlike thing, —
Old we were and wise we were, —
To the new-born king we bring
Gold and frankincense and myrrh.

Hark! What voices from on high
Warn us that the Lord is nigh.

CHORUS OF ANGELS

Glory, Glory, Glory
Be to God on high;
And on earth again
Peace and good-will to men.
Amen, amen.

FIRST SHEPHERD

(*Speaking, not singing, and without musical accompaniment. To the kings.*)

But wherefore myrrh, but wherefore bring ye myrrh?

FIRST KING. (*Ditto.*)

It is a perfume and a holy drug,
Fit for the toilet of an infant king;
And haply ye shall use it once again.

FIRST SHEPHERD. (*Ditto.*)

What other use, O wise men? Say what use.

FIRST KING. (*Ditto.*)

When ye anoint his body for the tomb.

ANGEL

Silly shepherds, ask no more:
More ye have no need to know.

Kneel but a while before this door,
And on your way rejoicing go.
This is your feast.
But you, ye wise men of the East,
With you it is not so;
For ye are old and wise, and ye are sad and slow,
And ye have followed from exceeding far,
Obedient to the star,
And left your lives and left your age behind.
Myrrh have ye brought his sacred limbs to bind,
The bitter myrrh that purges the sad mind,
And makes the tears to flow.
Then men, old men, rejoicing as ye go,
Mingle your myrrh with incense, yea, and gold,
And with the tears that ye may not withhold,
Knowing the things ye know.
It is a precious offering that ye bring
To this the infant king.
Kneel all of you below,
And sing your hymn.

(*The Shepherds and Kings kneel, forming a symmetrical group before the Virgin.*)

CHORALE DOXOLOGY

(*In which the Chorus of Angels, Kings, Shepherds, and Congregation join; with instruments; or organ.*)

O God, from whom proceedeth light,
Thy doings we adore.
The angels move within thy sight,
And bow thy works before.

Above this baby's head arrayed
Is all the heavenly host.
Praise to the Father, to the Son,
And to the Holy Ghost.

Amen.

ANGEL. (*Music.*)

Hark! melodious magic falls
From the gates of heaven's halls.
O'er the mother float the charms,
O'er the baby in her arms.
Lo, she sleeps, the Virgin mild
Is safely sleeping like the child.
From her eyes the shepherds fade,
And the kings pass far away;
All things have become a shade,
All things the same fate obey, —
Melt and merge and pass away.
(*The lights have been gradually turned down.*)
And behold, a newer seeming,
Through the dusk a kind of gleaming;
In the shadow of the rafter,
Stand new images of light;
Pictures of a deep hereafter
Gild the drowsy taper's light.
And the mother's eyes behold
All the baby's life to come,
From the cradle to the tomb.
But the meaning is not told,
Though the pictures are unrolled;
She the meaning must not know;
Only dimly like a show
One by one the pictures go.

(*The lights have been turned up gradually. The shepherds and kings have vanished and instead of them are shown John the Baptist and one or two of his followers. The scenes of the vision which follow should be stiffly and not dramatically handled. They should suggest the early mosaics. John is in the act of baptizing.*)

By the Congregation

Open now our ears to hear,
For the angel trumpet bloweth;
Let our eyes be wide and clear,
For the light of heaven gloweth.

In repentance and in ruth
Let our sins be washed away;
In the waters of his truth,
Be we rebaptized to-day.

Angel

The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. * * * Thou shalt baptize with water, but there cometh one after thee who shall baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire. * * *

(*These stars denote instrumental music, which should occasionally prefigure the words and images to come.*)

Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world.

(*The angel points with a rod or golden arrow. John's disciples do not see the angel, but they*

turn mechanically and look in the direction indicated. John is obscured for a moment and steps off the stage at the back.)

CHORUS OF ANGELS. (*Unseen.*)

Hosanna! Hosanna!

(*A brilliant chorus to last about one minute.*)

ANGEL

Bring forth the blind people that have eyes and the deaf that have ears. To open the blind eyes and bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sat in darkness out of the prison house. * * * Bring forth my witnesses saith the Lord. * * *

(*Enter one bearing a crutch.*)

Arise, take up thy bed and walk. * * *

(*Enter another.*)

I will; be thou clean. * * *

(*Enter a third.*)

Thy sins be forgiven thee. * * * Lazarus, come forth!

(*Enter Lazarus bound in grave clothes.*)

* * * Daughter of Jairus, arise and walk.

(*Enter daughter of Jairus.*)

Thou son of the widow of Nain, — thou son of the nobleman of Capernaum.

(*Enter these two.*)

* * * Mary Magdalene, out of whom were cast seven devils.

(*Enter Mary Magdalene and others. The healed and redeemed people stand in a motionless group or tableau.*)

By the Congregation

Crippled Christian, drop thy crutch,
And thy soul and flesh shall live.
Christ hath saved thee with his touch;
Christ doth every sin forgive.

Ye have sought him in the press:
Virtue flowed your fingers through.
Crippled Christian, rise and bless;
Ye are saved, if ye but knew.

Chorus of Angels

Who be ye that walk erect?

By the Congregation

Halleluja!

Chorus of Angels

Be ye Christ's and God's elect?

By the Congregation

Halleluja!

Chorus of Angels

Or sinners, lost, discarded, wrecked?

By the Congregation

Halleluja!

Chorus of Angels: Ye } be those on whom
By the Congregation: We }
descended
Faith; by faith our ills are ended,
Found, forgiven, changed, and mended.

Halleluja!

Chorus of Angels

Where be now your sorrows flown?

By the Congregation

Halleluja!

CHORUS OF ANGELS

Thought of anguish, sound of groan?

BY THE CONGREGATION

Halleluja!

CHORUS OF ANGELS

The heart of God doth take its own.

BY THE CONGREGATION

Halleluja!

CHORUS OF ANGELS: Ye
BY THE CONGREGATION: We } be those on whom descended

Faith; by faith our ills are ended,
Found, forgiven, changed, and mended.

Halleluja!

(*Enter many small children, some of them bearing others still smaller in their arms, and group themselves in front of the redeemed.*)

ANGEL

(*To accompany entrance of the children.*)

Except ye be converted and become as little children ye cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. * * * For in heaven their Angels do always behold the face of my father which is in heaven.

BY THE CONGREGATION

Ye on whom his hands were laid,
Little children, cluster here.
"Suffer them to come," he said.
Little children, come ye here.

Wisely had your mothers guessed,
(Fear not what disciples say)

When they laid you on his breast;
Ye shall not be kept away.
(*The instruments play a new chord.*)

ANGEL

Hark, the heavenly family
Chanting words that shall not die.
Hark again!

CHORUS OF ANGELS

Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.

ANGEL

Hark, hark again!

CHORUS OF ANGELS

Come unto me all ye that suffer and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

ANGEL

Hark, nay hark!

CHORUS OF ANGELS

Love your enemies.

ANGEL

Hark!

CHORUS OF ANGELS

Resist not evil; but overcome evil with good.

ANGEL

Hark!

CHORUS OF ANGELS

I am the Good Shepherd that giveth his life for the sheep.

ANGEL

Harken yet, ye faithful.

CHORUS OF ANGELS

Thy faith hath saved thee. Go in peace.

(*The last words, "Go in peace," are continued decrescendo while the redeemed disperse. The stage is empty and the Angel continues. The transition to the next episode, whether by a full close or by modulation, must be left to the musician. The following tableaux should be hardly divided by pauses, but should form a continuously moving show, accompanied by the Angel's words and by music.*)

ANGEL

Ye know that after two days is the feast of the Passover and the Son of Man is betrayed to be crucified. * * *

Then assembled together the Chief Priests and Scribes and the elders of the people and consulted that they might kill him.

(*Enter two or three chief priests and scribes in consultation.*)

Then one of the twelve called Judas Iscariot went unto the chief priests.

(*Enter Judas.*)

And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver.

(*The money is paid over to Judas.*)

And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him.

(*Exeunt priests and Judas.*)

Pilate saith unto them

(*Enter Pilate.*)

What shall I do with Jesus which is called Christ?

They all say unto him, Let him be crucified. * * *

Pilate took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person. See ye to it.

(*A basin has been brought in and Pilate washes his hands.*)

And they stripped him

(*Enter servants bearing scarlet robe, crown of thorns, reed, and rods.*)

and put on him a scarlet robe; and when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it on his head, and a reed in his right hand. * * * And as they came out they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name;

(*Enter Simon bearing the cross with the inscription upon it.*)

and him they compelled to bear the cross. * * * And they parted his garments, casting lots.

(*Enter soldiers, one with a bloody spear, one with a reed on which is a sponge, others with articles of apparel, sandals, girdle, shirt without seam. For some moments the light has been failing; the darkness is all but absolute.*)

CHORUS OF ANGELS

I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: Again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.

Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own,

and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

(*The music fails; dead silence.*) *A very small light shows Joseph of Arimathea bearing grave clothes. He is dressed, as in Michael Angelo's sculpture, in a pointed hood which is tied under his chin, and wears a cloak. He stoops very low.*)

ANGEL. (*Music again.*)

When the even was come there came a rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple.

And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock.

(*Exit Joseph.*)

BY THE CONGREGATION

Weep your Saviour's loss,
Him that none might save.
They have nailed him to the cross,
And borne him to the grave.
Weep ye: weep ye.

Ye must wash his feet,
And enwrap with care
His youthful flesh with spices sweet,
And for the grave prepare.
Weep ye: weep ye.

(*More light. Enter Mary the mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene.*)

ANGEL

Fear not ye; ye seek Jesus which was crucified. He is not here, for he is risen. See the place where the Lord lay.

(*A great light, or flash of light, shows the empty tomb. Then darkness.*)

ANGEL

Shadowy, picture things adieu, —
Bringing glory, bringing pain, —
We have seen and thought of you
Ye be mighty, ye be true,
And if ye fade it is to shine again —
Yes, to illumine us whose lives are new
And who but understand as babies do,
Or flowers refreshed by rain.

(*The light has been dawning.*)

For the Christmas morn is gleaming,
And the mother with her child
Wakes to greet the shepherds mild.
She who slept and has been dreaming,
Dreaming all these moments through,
Wakes to hear the shepherds singing
And to find the wise men bringing
Precious gifts, as wise men do.
Just a moment did she sleep;
Now she wakes and finds them near,
Gently wakes and smiles to hear
The piping shepherds and the tinkling sheep.

(*Light again. The shepherds and wise men are found in somewhat the same positions as at the first discovery.*)

SHEPHERDS. (*Sing.*)

We were seated on the ground
Half asleep when we awoke.
All at once it shined around,
From the clouds the glory broke.

And the angel voices sang,
Sweeter than the Psalmist's songs,
Gloriously their voices rang, —
"Glory, God, to thee belongs."

Hark! again their voices ring!
Hark! again I hear them sing!

CHORUS OF ANGELS

Glory, Glory, Glory
Be to God on high;
And on earth again
Peace and good-will to men.
Amen, amen.

(*Sigurd and Elsa have found their way to the stage and are now seen kneeling among the shepherds and kings.*)

CHORALE

(*In which the Chorus of Angels, the Shepherds, the Kings, and the Congregation all join.*)

O God from whom proceedeth light,
Thy doings we adore.
The angels move within thy sight

And bow thy works before.
Above this baby's head arrayed
Is all the Heavenly Host.
Praise to the Father, to the Son
And to the Holy Ghost.

Amen.

THE END

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